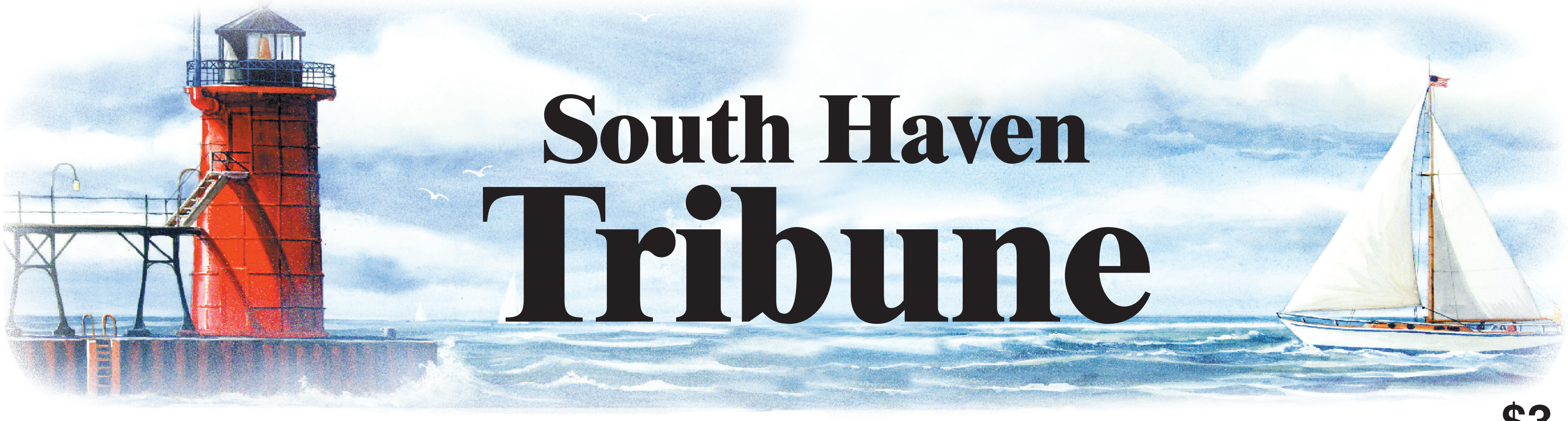

South Haven Tribune

$3

April 5, 2026

Photos by Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

Alex and Alissa Gosser recently opened Boards and a Boutique, a board game cafe and boutique in South Haven.

A passion for games

New game cafe offers unique experience in South Haven

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

Boards and a Boutique offers visitors a large selection of games from their board game library, which offers different versions of "Catan."

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven is known for it's beautiful beaches and tourism, but one couple is offering a new way for residents and visitors to spend time together – around a game table.

Alex and Alissa Gosser are originally from Illinois, but moved to Michigan in 2019. After living in South Haven for two years, they decided to pursue their passion for games by opening Boards and a Boutique.

"We've always loved board games," Alissa said. "We played with our friends for years. It's always made us feel better, it always brings community. We've played with family and friends on and off throughout the years and decided to maybe share that with this community and help people in a different way."

They were inspired by similar board game cafes in Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo and decided to open their own place in South Haven.

"We want a place for families to come and gather and be able to do something, like, outside of just eating and drinking and shopping," Alissa said.

The boutique has an extensive game library available for visitors to play, but are welcome to bring their own games that are not included in the game library.

Alissa said her top two favorite board games to play are "Ticket to Ride" and

See **CAFE**, page A2

South Haven celebrates first cadet becoming a firefighter

By TRIBUNE STAFF

Photo provided / Tom Renner

Cadet Ayden Quinn joins his father, Tim and grandfather Don as a third generation firefighter at South Haven Area Emergency Services.

SOUTH HAVEN — After establishing a cadet program three years ago, South Haven Area Emergency Services recently transitioned the program's first cadet to a firefighter.

According to a news release, Executive Director Brandon Hinz established the cadet program for local high school students to address the growing personal crisis fire departments are facing across the country.

Ayden Quinn became South Haven's first cadet to be officially certified as a paid-on-call firefighter.

Now a senior at South Haven High School, Quinn would frequently be seen at a fire scene or at the station with his dad long before the program was created.

Quinn becomes a third generation South Haven firefighter, joining his father, Tim, and grandfather, Don.

Tim is an active lieutenant in the department while Don retired from the department with 50 years of service, first with the Covert Fire Department, then South Haven Fire Department and the last 25 years with South Haven Area Emergency Services.

His grandmother, the late Pat Quinn, served on the Covert and South Haven departments.

See **FIREFIGHTER**, page A2

South Haven announces spring leaf pickup schedule

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The City of South Haven recently announced the spring leaf pickup schedule.

According to a news release, the leaf pick up will take place over four weeks beginning on April 6.

Collection schedule includes:

- ■ April 6 – April 10: Ward 1
- ■ April 13 – April 17: Ward 2
- ■ April 20 – April 24: Ward 3
- ■ April 27 – May 1: Last Collection Week

"For loose-leaf pickup, place unbagged leaves at the edge of your lawn near the street, but not on the road for safety reasons," the release stated.

Leaves must be accessible for collection by the city's leaf truck.

To prevent damage to equipment, do not include garden or yard trimmings, boards, sticks, or rocks in leaf piles. Leaf piles containing these items will not be collected.

"If you are unable to follow the city's schedule or have additional yard debris, you may bag leaves and bundle yard waste for collection by Best Way Disposal," The release stated.

Best Way Disposal yard waste pickup occurs weekly on the same day as trash collection, from April 1 to Nov. 30.

If a resident does not have a yard waste container, one can be requested by calling Best Way Disposal at 269-463-3232.

For more details on the yard waste program, go to www.bestway-disposal.com.

For additional details, contact the Department of Public Works at 269-637-0737.

Whitmer seeks federal aid after deadly southwest Michigan tornadoes

By BETH LEBLANC
The Detroit News (TNS)

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer asked President Donald Trump on Wednesday to declare a major disaster in three southwest Michigan counties in the wake of tornadoes that resulted in four deaths, multiple injuries and significant property damage.

If the request is granted, the area could qualify for federal individual assistance grants to help with home repairs, temporary housing and other recovery costs.

"I declared a state of emergency, but our work is just beginning," Whitmer said in a statement Wednesday. "As we wrap our arms around the affected communities, we are requesting federal assistance to ensure those affected have the resources they need to recover. Let's keep working together to keep people safe and help Michiganders rebuild."

The National Weather Service confirmed that four tornadoes hit southwest Michigan on the afternoon of March 6. The storm marked the state's deadliest weather event in nearly 50 years.

An EF3 tornado with winds of roughly 160 miles per hour tore through the Union City area in Branch County, injuring 12 and killing three. An EF1 tornado hit Edwardsburg in Cass County, resulting in the death of a 12-year-old boy.

An EF2 tornado with winds of at least 130 miles per hour also slammed Three Rivers in St. Joseph County and an EF0 tornado with winds peaking at about 85 mph touched down in Clarendon Township in Calhoun County.

Whitmer's request for individual assistance included the counties of Branch, Cass and St. Joseph.

"This critical step ensures our communities can access the resources they need to rebuild and have the tools necessary to support long-term recovery," said U.S. Rep. Tim Walberg, R-Tipton. "We will continue to work to support every community affected by this tragic weather event."

Local, state, and federal officials conducted a preliminary damage assessment of the areas hit on March 17 to assess the damage and determined it met the the benchmarks for federal assistance, Whitmer said in her statement.

How many homes were damaged by the March 6 tornadoes in southwest Michigan

Officials established that across the three counties, 33 homes were destroyed, 74 sustained major damage and 207 had minor damage, Whitmer said in her letter. About 100 households may qualify for temporary housing assistance, 67 for

See **TORNADOES**, page A2

The Tribune: Celebrating Our 127th Year

Forbes
AMERICA'S
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BRONSON

FIREFIGHTER

From page A1

While pursuing State of Michigan firefighter certification through an academy or a school district course, the cadets experience the profession first-hand by attending drills at the South Haven department with current staff, responding to real-life emergencies and spending time around the fire hall.

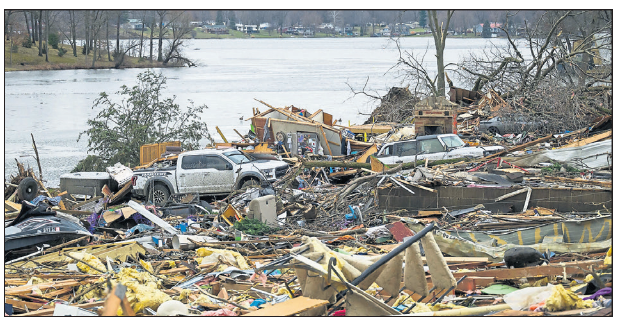
"Neighboring fire departments experienced great success with their FF Cadet programs, so I utilized their guidance in developing our own," Hinz said in the release.

Columbia Twp, Graafschap and North Berrien Fire Departments all shared policies and protocol to help develop a program that suited the department.

"Cadets are equipped with turnout gear and pagers," the release stated. "Their role at emergencies is to observe, not to fire-fight. A staff member serves as an on-scene mentor."

The program has grown to currently have six cadets. Michigan firefighters must be 18 years old to officially be certified as a firefighter.

"This milestone moment is so rewarding," Hinz said in the release. "I am grateful to our friends at the Van Buren ISD, the Van Buren and Berrien training councils, the families of our cadets and to our current SHAES staff for their support. Fire protection has been a South Haven community priority since the department's founding in 1888. Programs like this will assure its continued service long into the future."



Katy Kildee / The Detroit News / TNS

Prairie Rose Lane in Union City is seen March 7, strewn with debris from homes after the area was hit by a tornado the day before.

TORNADOES

From page A1

housing repair assistance and eight for housing replacement aid. But those numbers may "severely underestimate" the impact on individuals and houses, Whitmer wrote.

The letter estimated the counties needed about $1.4 million in federal individual and housing aid grants, including roughly $201,000 for temporary housing assistance, $497,000 for repair assistance, $385,000 for replacement assistance and $454,000 for other needs assistance.

The damage from the southwest Michigan tornadoes, combined with a rash of other severe weather events over the past two years, has put a strain on state aid resources, especially in light of an expected state budget shortfall, Whitmer wrote.

"I have determined that this incident is of such severity and magnitude that effective recovery is beyond the capabilities of the state of Michigan and the affected county and municipal governments, and that supplemental federal relief assistance is necessary," the governor wrote.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency will review the state's disaster declaration request and advise the president on whether to grant it.

In addition to grants for home repairs or temporary housing, individual assistance could take the form of low-interest loans to cover uninsured property or business recovery help.

OBITUARIES

Steve Cerny

Steve passed on to his eternal life in Christ Jesus on March 24, 2026 after a brief illness. Steve was born to Frank and Doris Cerny in South Haven, Mich. and was a lifelong resident.

Steve enjoyed muscle cars and driving his red '69 Chevy Cutlass, as well as a variety of cars or trucks in earlier years. Some of his favorite childhood memories were of he and his brother, Bob, riding their bikes to the old Murphy's store or Radio Shack and spending their allowance on car model kits then assembling them together at the dining room table.

These past few years he settled in to being "Papa" and driving the grandkids to and from school. He, along with Bob, have also been famous within the family for referring to the old "Andy Griffith" show and remembering many of the lines. There have been many happy family get togethers reminiscing about these simpler times.

Steve and Nancy were married on March 27, 2015, exactly five years after their first "blind date". They had 16 very happy years together. (LUD2- their inside joke). Steve and Nancy enjoyed traveling to Northport Michigan annually to take in the fall colors. They also enjoyed countless hours sitting "out back" talking, laughing and taking in the beauty of the property that God so graciously provided for them. He cherished time with family and friends all throughout his life.

Left to lovingly remember him are his wife and most devoted fan, Nancy. Two chosen daughters, Katie Aleman-Cloud (Aaron Cloud) and Sarah Aleman. Five much loved grandchildren also survive: Ryder, River, Roan, Jolene and Joaquin. Daphne, his faithful canine companion will miss him so very much.

His siblings will hold him in their hearts forever. Dale (Ann)Cerny, Linda Wadsworth, Teresa (Richard) Bodfish, Janet Casselman, Kathy (Ken) Maxwell, his brother and best friend, Bob (Sara) Cerny, and brother-in-law, John Sila and many nieces and nephews.

He is preceded in death by his parents, a brother, Rick Cerny, a sister, Sheila Sila and brother-in-law Dan Casselman.

Cremation has taken place and a private service will be held at a later date.

Please consider making a donation in honor of Steve to: Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital or a charity of your choice.

To those who choose to leave a memory or condolence go to: www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements are entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. 269-637-0333.

Mary Cooney

Oct. 13, 1943 – March 23, 2026

Mary Margaret (Shinske) Cooney, 82, of South Haven, Mich., passed away peacefully on March 23 after a courageous battle with leukemia, surrounded by her husband of 62 years, Kevin and her children.

She was a cherished wife, mother, grandmother, sister, aunt and friend and her presence will be deeply missed.

Mary was born in South Haven on Oct. 13, 1943, and was the oldest of three children of the late Kenneth and Jean Shinske. She attended LC Mohr High School and Western Michigan University, where she met her husband.

Mary and Kevin were married in June 1964 at St. Basil's Catholic Church in South Haven. They had three girls and moved to Indiana where they welcomed their son.

Kevin's career at Whirlpool took them to St Joseph, Mich.; Newburgh, Ind.; Marion, Ohio; Fremont, Ohio; and in retirement they split their time between South Haven and Scottsdale, Ariz. She accumulated lifelong friends in all these communities.

Mary is survived by her children Bridget Cooney (Mark Barriere), Molly King (Mike), Amy Tyrrell (David) and Kevin Jr. (Bri); her grandchildren Luke Tyrrell, Matthew King, Brendan King, Daniel Tyrrell, Kellan Cooney, Harrison Cooney, Emma Cooney, Everett Cooney and Ryan Cooney; as well as her sister Anne Szarkowski (David d. 2020) and brother Tom Shinske (Laura).

Mary possessed a remarkable range of talents and interests: she was a golfer, a bowler, a gardener, a party planner and an avid bridge player. She could knit a sweater or a blanket and occasionally she would sit at her piano and play a beautiful song. She was involved in her communities through her volunteer work at nonprofits such as Birthright and Scott Club; causes dear to her.

Above all, Mary cherished her family. She deeply loved her four children and their spouses and she adored her grandchildren. Her greatest happiness came from spending time with them—whether hosting family gatherings, spoiling the grandkids, or simply being surrounded by the people she loved most. Her home was the heart of the family and she made sure everyone felt special and cherished.

In lieu of calling hours, a rosary will be prayed on at 5 p.m. on Monday, April 6, at St. Basil Catholic Church located at 513 Monroe Blvd. in South Haven, MI.

The funeral mass will also be held at St. Basil Catholic Church, at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, April 7.

In lieu of flowers please consider a donation to St. Basil Catholic Church or the Michigan Maritime Museum.

To those who choose to leave a memory or condolence go to: www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements are entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. 269-637-0333.

Charles Beatty

Oct. 17, 1932 – March 23, 2026

Charles I. Beatty, 93, passed peacefully at the Inn in Holland, Mich. Monday, March 23, 2026.

He was born on Oct. 17, 1932 in Muskegon, Mich. to John and Selma Beatty. United in marriage to Janet Cameron on Sept. 17, 1960 in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Charles is survived by his wife of 65 years Janet, sons John Beatty, James (Victoria) Beatty and grandchildren Daniel and Sophia.

He is preceded in death by his parents, brother David Beatty and sisters Mattie Silvas and Patricia Evans.

Charles was a graduate of Muskegon High School. He then went on to graduate from Michigan Technological University with a B.S. in Civil Engineering. Charles completed his education at Northwestern University with a Master's Degree.

Charles finished his working career as an executive with Canonie Construction Company here in South Haven.

Charles was an active South Haven resident for 50 years. He was a former city council member and former project manager for the marina. When not active in the community he enjoyed collecting tools, listening to classical music and gardening.

A private family burial will take place at a later date.

Please consider making a donation in honor of Charles to a charity of your choice.

To those who choose to leave a memory or condolence, go to: www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements are entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. 269-637-0333.

You can't change the cards you were dealt just the way you play the hand

Alex Gosser sets up a board game recently at Boards and a Boutique in South Haven.

THE TORTURED NURSES

Photos by Julie Newell / Tribune Editor

Along with the gaming area, there is a small boutique with a variety of mental health themed items at Boards and a Boutique in South Haven.

CAFE

From page A1

"Settlers of Catan," while Alex's favorite game is "Twilight Imperium."

The boutique offers unlimited game play time, a complimentary drink and snack for $10.

Alex and Alyssa said they plan to host special game nights including Swoop, Euchre and puzzle tournaments.

People can also reserve tables or the entire space for private events like team building, birthdays, anniversaries, bachelor and bachelorette parties.

Along with the gaming area, there is a small boutique with a variety of T-shirts with mental health sayings on them, books and journaling items.

"I've always wanted to have a boutique," Alissa said. "And I've always wanted to call it 'testa rossa' because it means redhead in Italian. So, if you see 'testa rossa' on my tags, that's why."

Alissa said she wanted to spread awareness for mental health after her years working as a nurse for 14 years.

"I've done anything from MedSearch, to ER, to ER Psych, to impatient psych to phone triage," Alissa said. "I've done that for 14 years. I got really burnt out, developed some PTSD from nursing and decided to leave the field and so we decided to start something new."

Alex and Alissa said they hope to eventually expand the boutique to have a full bar and restaurant.

"Adam Walker, our Realtor, said that they are eventually going to be turning this into commercial development," Alissa said. "If that happens, then we would like to have a full kitchen, bar with tap. Eventually, the goal would have been a full restaurant, bar and gaming service."

On top of running Boards and a Boutique, Alex works as a data engineer at Stryker Manufacturing and both Alex and Alissa are in the process of writing books.

"Since I've travel nursed so much, I'm writing one about each unit I've gone to, over eight states and Alex is writing a fiction on AI since he works in data engineering," Alissa said.

The boutique, which is located at 269 Center St., had a soft launch on New Year's Eve and are now open from 1-9 p.m., Thursday through Sunday.

"We want our hours to be pretty flexible," Alex said. "We're also very flexible where people are here and playing a game and they're finishing up, you know, we don't mind 10, but 10 would probably be close to cut off."

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

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Al-Van Humane Society
Adopt ♥ Volunteer ♥ Donate ♥ Advocate
73303 8th Ave. PO Box 421 South Haven, MI 49090
phone 269.637.5062 fax 269.639.2242
Mon, Tue, Thurs, Fri 11 am to 5:30 pm; Sat 11 am to 3 pm; Wed, Sun Closed

Meet our Pet of the Week, Moose!

Moose

Meet our Pet of the Week, Moose! Meet Moose, a 4-month-old puppy ready for his next adventure. His foster family describes him as playful, adventurous, incredibly clever, and just the right amount of goofy. Moose also loves to learn and is already off to a great start. He knows sit and is eager to pick up new tricks, especially when there's a little consistency (and maybe a treat or two). To learn more about Moose or submit an adoption survey visit al-van.org/adopt!

Spring Into Giving

Local businesses are teaming up with nonprofits this Saturday for Spring Into Giving, and we're incredibly grateful that six amazing partners have chosen to support Al-Van this year. A huge thank you to Decadent Dogs, June Bugs, Kruger Comics, Lilac Soap Company, Phoenix Records & Boutique, and Polished Pup for being part of our pack. When you shop with them during the event, you are also helping support the animals here in our care.

Be sure to stop by Decadent Dogs for their annual Spring Dog Parade, where we'll be joining in on the fun.

THIS WEEK'S WISH LIST
Non-Clumping Clay Cat Litter, Wet Dog Food and Paper Towels

Palisades reaches key milestones in plant restart

By TRIBUNE STAFF

COVERT — Holtec Palisades recently announced the successful completion of passivation of its primary system.

According to a news release, this is an essential step to ensure long-term equipment reliability and a key milestone in the ongoing effort to return the plant to service.

To perform passivation, the Palisades team brought the primary system to normal operating temperature and pressure for the first time since the plant was shut down in 2022.

"Establishing and maintaining these conditions allowed for precise control of water chemistry and restoration of the system's protective surfaces following extensive maintenance, inspection and component upgrades completed over the past two years," the release stated.

This work builds on the restoration efforts across the primary system, including steam generator tube repairs, pressure boundary weld restorations and a first-ever comprehensive system cleaning that significantly reduced dose rates in sensitive areas of the plant.

"With passivation complete, the system will now be cooled and prepared for additional testing, equipment upgrades, and preparations for fuel loading," the release stated.

Additional activities underway include upgrades to the fuel handling system, switchyard restoration work, completion of required surveillances and final closeout of major maintenance evolutions.

"The completion of primary system passivation reflects the diligence and technical rigor our team is bringing to position the plant for safe, reliable operation for decades," Holtec International President Kelly Trice said in the release. "Ensuring long-term safety and reliability remains the central focus of our restart mission, and we continue to execute this work with the care and precision it warrants."

Other recent accomplishments include completing more than 300 inspections of piping and welds, as well as reinstalling the main turbine generator.

"In parallel with restart activities, Holtec is advancing plans for the future deployment of its Pioneer 1 and 2 SMR-300 units at the Palisades site in collaboration with our global partners Hyundai E&C and Mitsubishi Electric," the release stated.

The planned two-unit small modular reactor project is expected to provide an additional 680 megawatts of total electric output, complementing the more than 800 megawatts baseload output from the restarted Palisades plant.

In December 2025, the Pioneer project was selected for a $400 million U.S. Department of Energy matching grant to support its deployment. The grant will become effective after certain conditions are met, including the negotiation and execution of a funding agreement.

In February 2026, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission accepted the first part of Holtec's Construction Permit Application for review. Early site preparation activities are also underway in accordance with approved permits.

The Pioneer 1 and 2 units are targeted for commissioning in the early 2030s, pending regulatory reviews and approvals.

"We expect the Pioneer units to be among the first SMRs commissioned in the United States," the release stated.

Fire Rescue

Photo provided / Tom Renner

Columbia Township Fire Department and Bangor Community, Bloomingdale, Lee Township and South Haven Area Emergency Services respond to a Sunday morning fire in Columbia Township.

Columbia Township mobile home engulfed in flames

Lone occupant escapes fire without injury

By TRIBUNE STAFF

BREEDSVILLE — Firefighters from five departments in Van Buren County responded to a fire that engulfed a Columbia Township mobile home over the weekend.

According to a news release, the five fire departments were dispatched Sunday morning to 18th Avenue near 53rd Street, west of Breedsville in Van Buren County.

Responding was the Columbia Township Fire Department with mutual aid provided by the Bangor Community, Bloomingdale, Lee Township and South Haven Area Emergency Services.

"The lone occupant escaped without injury," the release stated. "The fire appeared to have started on the front porch and spread throughout the structure."

One firefighter suffered a cut to a hand and was treated on scene by Life EMS Ambulance personnel. According to the release, the firefighter continued his tasks after receiving medical treatment.

Firefighters respond to a fire Sunday morning at a Columbia Township mobile home.

First Church of God celebrates renovation project completion

Rededication to be held during Easter service

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — First Church of God of South Haven, recently announced the completion of a renovation project related to safety, security, health and code issues.

According to a news release, the church is celebrating this accomplishment with a special rededication service during their Easter service on April 5.

"With the original portion of our building dating back to 1931 and the sanctuary dating to 1974, some of this work was overdue," the release stated. "The transformation is amazing."

The work included replacing the original 1931 windows and updating the HVAC systems which included air conditioning for the first time.

Regular church services will begin at 9:30 a.m. and will be followed by the rededication service at 10:30 a.m.

"While we are celebrating the work accomplished, we want to thank God for how he has blessed this church," the release stated. "We want to rededicate the building to doing the work established here in South Haven since 1886."

A slideshow of the renovations will precede the rededication. State Pastor Mark Richardson will speak during the rededication.

"The special service will also serve to focus on what God is doing here and our responsibility to carry the message of Christ out to our community," the release stated.

Photos provided

First Church of God of South Haven is celebrating the completion a renovation project with a special rededication service during their Easter service.

First Church of God of South Haven recently completed a renovation project related to safety, security, health and code issues.

Ranked choice voting group heckled, booted from Michigan GOP convention

By BETH LEBLANC
The Detroit News (TNS)

DETROIT — A ranked choice voting group that paid to attend the Michigan Republican Party convention Saturday said it was escorted from the Novi convention center premises by security after continued heckling by party members and state Rep. Matt Maddock.

Rank MI Vote said the Republican lawmaker from Milford repeatedly called volunteers "communists" and threatened one volunteer by indicating that, if he were in the parking lot, he would "kick your ass."

"We were having a productive day meeting like-minded, politically engaged convention attendees until Rep. Maddock chose to bully our volunteers and anyone who stopped to speak with us," said Jennifer Umphress, conservative working group director with Rank MI Vote.

Maddock, when asked whether he threatened the volunteers, said via text: "I threatened to expose them and I did."

Michigan GOP chair sorry he let Ranked MI Vote attend convention

State Sen. Jim Runestad, the chairman of the Michigan Republican Party, expressed some remorse for allowing the group to attend the convention.

"It was a regrettable decision to permit them to have a table," Runestad said. "Once concerns were brought to our attention, we revoked their table privileges and will be issuing a refund.

"I am not personally familiar with the Rep. Maddock situation," he added.

Maddock is a fourth-term lawmaker who serves as the majority vice chair for the House Appropriations Committee. Maddock's wife, Meshawn Maddock, is the former co-chair of the Michigan Republican Party.

Rank MI Vote last year tried to gather signatures for a ballot proposal that would usher in ranked choice voting, which allows people, generally, to rank candidates for a particular office, with the ultimate winner required to get a majority of the support. The group stopped collecting signatures late last year and the proposal is not expected to appear on the November ballot.

Ranked MI Vote said it wanted to discuss voting issues with delegates

Umphress said the group is well aware that the Republican leadership is largely opposed to ranked choice voting, but the group decided to inquire about a table at the convention in a good-faith effort to discuss the matter with delegates. Umphress said she herself has twice been a Republican delegate at the statewide convention.

"I got a gracious reply back on that from Team Runestad saying they would welcome us at the convention," Umphress told The News.

The group paid $500 for its table and had a total of 11 volunteers throughout the day Saturday inside Novi's Vibe Credit Union Showplace, where the convention took place.

The group said it had a "good morning" of engagement and debate with convention attendees until Maddock showed up at the table shortly before noon Saturday.

Maddock accused of making 'derogatory remarks' against group

The lawmaker made "repeated derogatory remarks," including referring to volunteers as communists, then set up a chair directly in front of the table to heckle and block individuals visiting the table, Rank MI Vote said in a statement.

Around noon, security removed Maddock's chair, and the staff attempted to block Maddock from the table until the lawmaker retreated, the group said.

At 1:15 p.m., Maddock returned with about 20 people who surrounded the table and shouted "communists" and "shame" at volunteers, the group said. Maddock, at one point, told a volunteer that "If we were in the parking lot, I'd kick your ass," Rank MI Vote said in a statement.

Security returned and then, later, at the request of the party leadership, asked Rank MI Vote to leave and escorted volunteers from the building, the statement said. At that point, Umphress said, volunteers were told there were safety concerns and that calls had been made to the national party.

Umphress said Runestad and the Republican leadership "were gracious and attempted to intervene to keep us safe."

Maddock calls Rank MI Voting members 'communists'

Maddock on Tuesday posted video on social media that he appeared to have taken at the convention, in which he referred to the volunteers as "straight up communists."

"None of us are communists," one volunteer responded, trying to argue that ranked choice voting benefited all voters.

"We stopped you guys dead in your tracks," Maddock told the volunteers, referring to the group's ballot proposal.

Eggs for Easter cost much less than last year – a look at the numbers

By DEE-ANN DURBIN
Associated Press

U.S. egg prices have fallen 60 percent from last year's record highs, making it easier for consumers to fill their Easter baskets and Passover Seder plates.

Bird flu was to blame for elevated retail prices during the first five months of 2025, and the course of the highly contagious disease is a big reason why prices are much lower now. An outbreak forced farmers and commercial producers to slaughter entire broods of egg-laying hens, but ebbing cases in the second half of last year helped restore egg supplies, said Mark Jordan, the executive director of agricultural research firm LEAP Market Analytics.

The stubborn outbreak is still affecting U.S. poultry flocks, with the number of infected commercial flocks rising in March. But farmers have been rapidly replenishing flocks that died or had to be destroyed. Between July 2024 and July 2025 the number of egg-type chicks hatched in the U.S. rose 8 percent. It was the first sustained and substantial increase in the availability of specially-bred layer chicks since the bird flu outbreak began in 2022, Jordan said.

The Trump administration's decision to import nearly 1 billion eggs last year also helped lower prices, Jordan said, although imports have since returned to more normal levels. The U.S. also exported fewer eggs last year to help boost domestic supplies.

But what's good for consumers isn't necessarily good for farmers, who are finding it difficult to recoup their costs as egg prices plummet. They also may have to pay more for feed, including corn and soybean meal, because of the Iran war.

Here's a look at U.S. egg prices by the numbers, according to government figures:

- ■ $2.50 per dozen: Average U.S. price for a dozen eggs in February.
- ■ $6.23 per dozen: Average U.S. price for a dozen eggs in March 2025, which was an all-time high.
- ■ 315.8 million: Number of egg-laying hens in the U.S. as of March 1. That's 8 percent higher than last year.
- ■ 45 million: Number of egg-laying hens in Iowa, the top U.S. state for egg production.
- ■ 205.7 million: Number of chickens and other birds in commercial and backyard flocks that died or were culled due to bird flu since February 2022.
- ■ 5.22 million: Number of chickens and other birds that died or were culled because of bird flu in March 2026. That is more than double the number affected in March 2025.
- ■ 657 percent: The percentage increase in U.S. imports of shell eggs in 2025 compared to the year before.
- ■ $1.05: Average cost for farmers to produce a dozen eggs, not including labor and transportation, according to the American Egg Board. In late March, the national average wholesale price of eggs was $1.17 per dozen.

A year after 'Liberation Day,' what did Trump's tariffs achieve?

By MICHAEL WILNER
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

WASHINGTON — One year ago, Donald Trump stood in a sun-kissed, unpaved Rose Garden and defiantly announced a new era of global trade, raising tariffs on countries worldwide and sending shock waves through the global economy.

The president promised short-term pain rippling through American households would make way for a U.S. economy that would soon take off. But experts say they are still waiting for receipts – and question whether they will ever come.

A year of turbulence

Tariff rates shifted so unpredictably for so long – across countries and with remarkable speed – that companies are still struggling to build stable, long-term supply chains capable of supporting future planning and growth. U.S. markets recorded one of the most volatile years in history, marked by extreme swings and modest gains driven by a handful of stocks for tech companies largely inoculated from import duties.

Federal customs duties brought in tens of billions of dollars. But a study published this week by the European Central Bank found that U.S. importers and consumers, not foreign exporters, bore the brunt of the costs that paid for it – and that an even larger share of the burden will fall on American households and companies the longer Trump's tariff policies stay in place.

Despite the president's pronouncements, tariff earnings have barely made a dent in the federal debt.

Tax cuts and additional spending on defense and immigration enforcement have increased the annual deficit. In the months of January and February alone, net customs duties hit an average of $27 billion – a significant figure that has essentially offset the costs of Trump's war with Iran, now estimated to be more than $57 billion since its start.

In February, the Supreme Court ruled that Trump had exceeded his authority by bypassing Congress to impose tariffs on an emergency basis. But the decision has merely prompted the Trump administration to look for ways to bypass the high court, as well.

"Even after the court ruling, the Trump administration continues to wield tariffs in a haphazard and ill-conceived fashion," said Kimberly Clausing, a professor of tax policy and law at UCLA School of Law. "One year in, Trump's tariffs have only generated higher prices, economic disruption, frayed alliances, and manufacturing job loss."

Since the court ruling, Trump has moved away from using broad emergency powers to justify tariff rates, now citing laws on national security and unfair trade practices to keep them in place. Those are being challenged, as well.

"Trump's tariff mania injected uncertainty into global business supply chains that he is refusing to let the Supreme Court undo," said Aaron Klein, chair of economic studies at the Brookings Institution.

"It would be one thing if Trump replaced the existing tariff system with a coherent strategy approved by the very Republican Congress he controls," Klein added. "Instead, Trump's on-again, off-again tariff by tweet and let the courts figure it out months later destroys business' ability to plan and undermines global confidence in America's trustworthiness."

'Mounting downside'

Whether or not the president's tariff policies survive, they have succeeded in ushering in a new era of international trade, shifting global reliance on the U.S. dollar and on the American consumer market, experts said.

"The euro, the Chinese yuan and crypto will be the biggest beneficiaries as the dollar loses market share," said Kenneth Rogoff, an economist and professor at Harvard. "Future historians may well look back some day and see Liberation Day as marking the beginning of the end of the dollar's absolute dominance in global markets, and the 'exorbitant privilege' it has given to the United States as issuer of what once upon a time was the world safest currency."

Mary Lovely, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, said that Trump's tariff policies have upended global shipping, prompted China to increase offshore investments in countries like Vietnam to process Chinese inputs for the U.S. market, and elevated long-term uncertainty over investing in North America – a trifecta that has ensured that U.S. companies and consumers bear the costs.

"While the president promised an American 'industrial renaissance,' manufacturing jobs have been lost every month since early 2023," Lovely said. "Easy to see the mounting downside of his tariff barrage, hard to find much upside."

More than 100,000 net jobs in the U.S. manufacturing sector have been lost over the last year, in part due to the increased costs facing U.S.-based manufacturing companies for parts and inputs, said Michael Strain, director of economic policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

That has made domestic manufacturing less competitive. "The trade war has also increased the prices facing consumers at a time when affordability is their top concern," Strain added.

The policy has become a political albatross for the president, who now proceeds through a midterm year with a bipartisan majority of Americans dissatisfied with his approach to their top concern. Seven in 10 Americans believe that tariffs have increased their costs of living, according to a recent poll, including 64 percent of Republicans and 67 percent of independents.

Sung Won Sohn, a former commissioner at the Port of Los Angeles, said that inflation aggravated by Trump's tariff actions has complicated policy at the Federal Reserve, fueling uncertainty in the U.S. stock market.

The Supreme Court's decision, which prompted legal ambiguity on the administration's path forward and opened the door to a flood of litigation for potential tariff refunds, further added to uncertainty. "The net result is decreased economic efficiency," Sohn said.

Trump faces worse poll numbers on inflation than former Presidents Carter and Biden, both of whom faced challenges with increased prices on goods. Today, 72 percent of Americans disapprove of the president's handling of rising prices, according to a CNN poll released this week.

"The real damage from the tariffs – and their uneven unwinding – is not captured in headline GDP figures," Sohn added. "It shows up in slower decision-making, reduced productivity, and a persistent fog over the economic outlook."

South Haven Tribune CLASSIFIEDS

Classified Desk: 1-855-317-4292
Hours: Monday - Friday 9am-2pm EST

0900 LEGALS

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
Van Buren COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Decedent's Estate

CASE NO. and JUDGE
2026-0135-DE
Hon. Susan Metzger

Court address
212 E. Paw Paw St., #220,
Paw Paw, MI 49079
Court telephone no.
(269)657-1955

Estate of: Cathy Jean Darrigan
Date of birth: * 06/11/1955

TO ALL CREDITORS: **

NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The decedent, Cathy Jean Darrigan, died 01/02/2026. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to Kerry Darrigan, personal representative, or to both the probate court at 212 E. Paw Paw St., #220, Paw Paw, MI 49079 and the personal representative within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.

Date April 01, 2026

Barry Conybeare P52056
Attorney name Bar No.
519 Main Street
Address
St. Joseph, MI 49085
City, state, zip
269-983-0561
Telephone no.

Kerry Darrigan
Personal Representative
57857 89th Ave
Address
Decatur, MI 49047
City, State, Zip
269-782-3025
Telephone no.

Sell your unwanted items quickly with a classified ad.

0900 LEGALS

STATE OF MICHIGAN
COUNTY OF VAN BUREN

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
DECEDENT'S TRUST

Decedent: Elmer G. Kroeg, Deceased
Date of birth: 1927

Elmer G. Kroeg Revocable Trust dated January 3, 1995, as amended

NOTICE TO ALL CREDITORS: The decedent, Elmer G. Kroeg, 677 Hazen Street, Paw Paw, MI 49079, died on December 24, 2025. The decedent established the Elmer G. Kroeg Revocable Trust dated January 3, 1995, as amended. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the Trust and the Estate will be forever barred unless presented to Dennis A. Kroeg, Trustee of the above-referenced Trust, within four (4) months after the date of publication of this notice.

Date: 04/05/2026

Attorney: Michael A. Shields
Lewis, Reed & Allen, P.C.
136 East Michigan Ave, Ste 800
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007
Phone: (269) 388-7600

Trustee: Dennis A. Kroeg
Address: 68549 Oak Spring Rd
Edwardsburg, MI 49112

People Do Read Small Ads. You Did!

Special Meeting Synopsis
Casco Township Board Meeting
Thursday, March 26th, 5:00 PM
CALL TO ORDER: Overhiser called the meeting to order at 5:00.
PRESENT: Overhiser, Clevenger, Campbell & Ridley.
ABSENT: Fleming
ITEMS APPROVED: Minutes from 3/16/26
Patio Furniture Budget for Senior Services
ADJOURNMENT: 5:16 PM
Allan Overhiser, Casco Supervisor
Rachel Ridley, Casco Clerk

0900 LEGALS

NOTICE OF ELECTION
CITY OF BANGOR, MICHIGAN
MAY 5th, 2026 ELECTION

TO THE QUALIFIED ELECTORS OF THE CITY OF BANGOR:
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that a regular election will be held in the City of Bangor on

Tuesday May 5th 2026
The Polls will be open from 7:00am to 8:00pm

At the following location:
Precinct 1 257 W. Monroe Street
Bangor MI 49013

For the purpose of electing candidates to the following offices:
Two (2) Council Members each with a 3-year term

Electors may obtain Absentee Ballots from the City Clerk's office at 257 W Monroe St.

BANGOR CITY CLERK
SHELLY UMBANHOWAR

White Space Sells

0900 LEGALS

NOTICE OF REGISTRATION FOR THE ELECTION TO BE HELD ON TUESDAY MAY 5, 2026
CITY OF BANGOR, MICHIGAN

TO THE QUALIFIED ELECTORS OF THE CITY OF BANGOR:

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that any qualified elector of the City of Bangor who is not already registered may register to vote at the office of the City Clerk; the office of the County Clerk; a Secretary of State branch office, or other designated state agency. Registration forms can be obtained at mi.gov/vote and mailed to the City Clerk. Voters who are already registered may update their registration at www.expressSOS.com.

The last day to register in any manner other than in person with the local clerk is Tuesday, April 21nd, 2026.

After this date, anyone who qualifies as an elector may register to vote in person with proof of residency (MCL 168.497) at the City of

0900 LEGALS

Bangor Clerk's office, located at 257 W. Monroe St. Bangor, MI 49013 at the following times:

- Regular business hours: Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Saturday, May 2nd from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Election Day, Tuesday, May 5th from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that the City of Bangor will be voting on Two (2) Council Members.

0900 LEGALS

Full text of the ballot proposal may be obtained at the City of Bangor Clerks office, 257 W. Monroe St. Bangor, MI 49013, telephone: 269-427-5831. A sample ballot may be viewed at mi.gov/vote.

Persons with disabilities needing accommodations should contact the clerk's office.

Shelly Umbanhowar
City of Bangor Clerk

Bangor Public Schools NOTICE OF VACANCY

The Bangor Public School District is seeking applications/letter of interest for 1 (one) current vacant position on the Board of Education. An individual will be appointed to fill the vacant positions until the November 2026 election.

Individuals must submit letter of interest/application expressing interest in the Board position to the Secretary of the Superintendent, Melissa Quinn at the Superintendent Office, 801 W. Arlington, Bangor, Michigan 49013 no later than noon on April 17, 2026.

Following a review of the submitted materials, the Board will schedule interviews with candidates at a Special Board Meeting on April 27, 2026. If you have any questions concerning the role of the Board of Education and the responsibilities of a Board member, please contact Mr. Lynn Johnson, Superintendent of Bangor Public Schools.

TIMELINE
March 31, 2026 Notice of vacancy announced.
Noon, April 17, 2026 Deadline for submitting applications.
April 27, 2026 Board meets to conduct interviews of applicants.

To be eligible, a person must be a registered voter and resident in the Bangor Public School District, at least 18 years of age, a citizen of the U.S., a resident of the State of Michigan for at least 30 days.

The Board of Education of Bangor Public Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, age, height, weight, marital status, or any other legally protected characteristic, in its programs and activities including employment opportunities.

801 West Arlington Street, Bangor, Michigan 49013
Phone: (269) 427-6800 | Fax: (269) 427-6865

Casco Township General Receptionist/Building Dept Assistant

Casco Township is currently seeking someone to serve as a General Receptionist and Building Department Assistant at the Casco Township Hall, 7104 107th Ave, South Haven.

This is a multifunctional position that would require hours Monday through Friday, 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM, with no weekend or Holiday requirements. This person will report to the Casco Township Clerk and take direction from the Building Inspector. Beginning rate of pay: $21-$23/hour.

Job Responsibilities would include, but are not limited to

*Greeting visitors as the first point of contact and answering incoming calls with professionalism and courtesy.

*Directing visitors and phone calls to the appropriate staff within the Township, along with handling basic questions and inquiries regarding Township operations.

*Maintaining, organizing, and scanning files, records, and correspondence within the Township.

*Supporting the Building Inspector with administrative tasks such as data entry, scheduling, organization of records, and other daily functions.

*Assisting the Building Inspector with input into the building database.

*Providing and processing payments for building permits within the Township.

*Assisting the Clerk, Election Coordinator, or Treasurer with seasonal tasks during Elections and tax collection time.

*Ordering supplies and maintaining a supply inventory for the Township.

Required skills, requirements, and education

*Strong organizational skills with attention to detail for managing multiple office tasks at once.

*Ability to handle sensitive information with discretion and maintain confidentiality.

*Exceptional verbal and written communication skills to handle client interactions and professional correspondence.

*Proficiency in using office software such as Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook, and PowerPoint.
Professional appearance and demeanor.

*High School Diploma or equivalent required. Additional office, administrative training, or reception experience preferred.

To apply, please submit resume to clerk@cascotownship.org or by mail to 7104 107th Ave. South Haven, MI 49090.
Casco Township is an equal opportunity employer. We do not discriminate based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or any other protected status.

EAU CLAIRE SCHOOLS

Eau Claire schools to pursue $7 million bond

District also eyes renewal of current operational millage

By TRIBUNE STAFF

EAU CLAIRE — Eau Claire Public Schools voters will consider two ballot proposals that would affect the district on May 5.

Under consideration is a $7.09 million bond millage to address building infrastructure needs, as well as a renewal of the district's current operational millage.

District officials say the bond proposal focuses primarily on replacing aging heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems and addressing necessary roofing repairs throughout the district.

Many of the current systems – particularly in the elementary school – have exceeded their expected lifespan by decades. Superintendent Ann Cluff said aging equipment has led to inconsistent classroom temperatures, reduced air filtration and increased emergency maintenance costs.

"Our HVAC system dates back to the 1950s and has reached the end of its life," Cluff said. "Right now, we're essentially keeping it running with temporary fixes. Reliable heating and cooling systems might not sound exciting, but they make a huge difference in the learning environment. When classrooms are comfortable and systems work properly, students and staff can focus on learning instead of distractions."

District leaders say replacing the outdated systems will improve reliability and energy efficiency while reducing the need for costly emergency repairs.

Cluff said the district identified several priorities the bond proposal would address, including the replacement of heating and cooling units that frequently break down during peak seasons; installation of modern, high-efficiency HVAC systems expected to lower utility costs over time; and decreasing the ongoing expense of maintaining obsolete equipment and sourcing outdated parts.

The proposed bond totals $7.09 million, estimated at 2.39 mills. District officials estimate the cost for the average homeowner would be about $22 per month.

District administrators say the bond proposal has been limited to essential infrastructure improvements and does not include additional expansion projects.

In addition to the bond proposal, voters will also consider a renewal of the district's operational millage.

Operational millages in Michigan are approved by voters on a recurring basis and apply only to non-homestead properties, such as businesses, rental properties and second homes. The 18-mill operational millage does not apply to a primary residence.

Cluff said the renewal is necessary to maintain current school operations and funding levels.

Additional information about the bond proposal, operational millage renewal and a tax calculator for residents is available at eauclaireps.com. Community members with questions are encouraged to contact the district office.

Carsie Blanton kicks off tour with Saugatuck concert

By TRIBUNE STAFF

Photo provided

Singer, Songwriter and Activist Carsie Blanton is kicking off her US Tour with a benefit concert in Saugatuck, Mich. on May 12.

SOUTH HAVEN — Singer, Songwriter, and Activist Carsie Blanton is kicking off her US Tour in Saugatuck, Mich. on May 12 with a benefit concert for Todos Bienvenidos.

According to a news release, this event is presented by South Haven Indivisible in cooperation with Indivisible chapters in Saugatuck, Douglas, Paw Paw, Holland/Zeeland, SWMI (St. Joseph) and with Todos Bienvenidos, the organization helping western Michigan families affected by ICE and the South Haven LGBTQ+ Advocacy Group.

Blanton is appearing with special guests Grupo Entrega Total and a musical welcome by Persisterhood.

"Carsie is known for her intimate, politically charged concerts that blend folk, jazz and cabaret-style songwriting," the release stated. "Her live shows often focus on themes of love and rage, anti-fascism and community care, with recent performances featuring protest songs targeting billionaires and social inequality, often encouraging audience singalongs."

Members of the South Haven Indivisible Core Council reached out to Blanton to ask her to do a benefit concert after listening to her new release, "Little Flame," a song about hope and the enduring fight for justice.

"It was a long shot," Core Council Member Cindy Ariel said in the release. "But I asked if there was any way she could fit us in for a fundraiser for the local organization helping local farm workers dealing with ICE. Carsie graciously agreed to come out of her way the day before her Midwest tour officially begins in Evanston, Ill. to donate her time to play a Benefit in our area."

Leader of Todos Bienvenidos David Moore emphasized the importance of the benefit concert in the release.

"The financial support of this community event will enhance our ability to keep neighbors affected by ICE in their homes, with heat and lights on, and help to provide short term solutions to the many curve balls being thrown their way," Moore said. "Because they cannot often say thank you openly, I want to express their and our deep appreciation for Carsie Blanton's support and the support of everyone making donations and buying tickets for this event. The concern it conveys means the world."

Blanton said in the release that it is important to support organizations like Todos Bienvendidos.

"Solidarity means our neighbors' safety and health is tied up with our own," Blanton said. "I'm honored to sing with the people doing this important work. ICE out of everywhere."

Doors open for the concert at 6:30 p.m. and the concert takes place from 7:30 to 9 p.m. at the Saugatuck Center for the Arts, 400 Culver St, Saugatuck, MI 49453.

All profit will go to Todos Bienvenidos. Tickets can be purchased at secure.actblue.com/donate/cbconcert.

Beckwith Theatre Company seeks local playwrights for festival

By TRIBUNE STAFF

DOWAGIAC — The Beckwith Theatre Company recently announced it is now accepting submissions for its 3rd Annual Local Playwrights Festival of 10-Minute Plays.

According to a news release, the festival will take place in February 2027 and submissions are currently being accepted through 11:59 p.m. on Sept. 11.

"The Festival celebrates original short plays from local playwrights residing in SW Michigan and Northern Indiana," the release stated. "All directors and actors are also local."

Proceeds benefit the Beckwith Theatre Company's Capital Campaign Fund, which supports the historic building's upkeep and planned renovations. Playwrights, directors and actors receive no remuneration.

As with prior festivals, playwrights must focus their submission on one of five designated themes, activities, or props including:

- Senior Citizen Experiences
- A Car Ride
- High School
- A Rocking Chair (Set Prop)
- A Coffee Cup/Mug with a Broken Handle (Hand Prop)

The festival is open to playwrights residing in Michigan counties including: Berrien, Cass, Van Buren, St. Joseph and Kalamazoo. Indiana counties include: Laporte, St. Joseph and Elkhart.

The submission guidelines include:

- Original script not previously produced and will not be produced before February 2027 (staged or feedback readings are acceptable)
- Playwrights may submit up to 3 original, non-AI-generated scripts
- Plays must have a beginning, middle, and end (no skits)
- Run time of 10 minutes; shorter is fine, slightly longer may be allowed.
- Minimum of 2 characters; maximum of 5 characters
- Any theatre genre accepted: absurd, comedic, dramatic, dark, farce, mystery, tragedy, literal or figurative
- Must address one of the five themes, activities, or props
- Can be staged with minimal sets, props, and costumes
- No musicals; limited songs or music allowed if no royalties are required
- Limited foul language; limited sound and lighting cues
- No submission fee; plays submitted will not be returned
- No revisions will be accepted after submission

All submissions must follow Standard Stage Play Format which is available by emailing btcplayfestival@gmail.com or via the Dramatists Guild website.

Submissions are required to use a 12-point readable font (e.g., Times New Roman) with margins of at least 0.75 inches. Submit only PDF or MS Word files.

Two files per entry must be submitted including:

- Title Page File: Title, theme/prop addressed, 2–3 sentence descriptor, your name, email, phone, mailing address, and copyright if applicable.
- Script File: Title in header and page numbers, but no playwright-identifying information.

All submissions can be sent in via email to btcplayfestival@gmail.com.

A Beckwith Theatre Company review committee will read and score each submission, evaluating plot, characters, writing style and voice, staging feasibility, variety, overall impact and guideline compliance.

Playwrights will be notified by email of the decision. No feedback will be provided on plays not selected.

"Selected playwrights agree to a production by local directors and actors and to possible recording or photography for marketing purposes," the release stated. "They will be recognized in programs, promotional materials, and on social media, and will be offered complimentary ticket pairs for performances they attend."

For more information, go to beckwiththeatrecompany.com/fest or email btcplayfestival@gmail.com.

Submit news tips

Submit news tips online
at www.southhaventribune.net
or call 269-637-1104.

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SOUTH HAVEN COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Photo provided / Tom Renner

South Haven High School geometry students took their raft construction project to the pool to test the raft's stability, load, speed and mathematical accuracy.

Ongoing events

Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

Three Blondes Brewing: Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Sparkle and Spice Boutique: Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9-10 a.m.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

Candlelight Yoga: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

Food pantry: First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

Food pantry: Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Thursdays.

Food, clothing, baby pantry: Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Personal care and clothing pantry: First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

South Haven Memorial Library: Story Time on 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays through May 26, 2026.

HawksHead: Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

Lakeside Social Bowling Alley: Glow Bowl every Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

Bridge: Chicago Scoring at 1 p.m. on Tuesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Bridge: Duplicate Scoring at 1 p.m. on Wednesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Michigan Maritime Museum: free admission on the first Sunday of every month from November through April.

First United Methodist Church: Free meals every Tuesday night. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Meal is served at 6 p.m.

South Haven Memorial Library: Bridge Card Game from 1 to 4 p.m. every Tuesday and Wednesday. Open to the public. Beginners are welcome.

Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for students grades 6 through 12 every Monday from 3 to 5 p.m.

April

7 – Scott Club: Tracks of Progress – Black River Railroad at the First Congregational church at 651 Phoenix Street at 1 p.m.

7 – Baseball: Boys varsity team against Dowagiac High School at 4 p.m.

7 – Softball: Girls varsity team against Dowagiac High School at 4 p.m.

7 – Tennis: Girls varsity team against Buchanan High School at 4:30 p.m.

7 – South Haven Garden Club: Bird watching kickoff meeting at 6:30 p.m. at the South Haven Memorial Library.

8 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

9 – South Haven Indivisible: "The Impact of Christian Nationalism in the US" speaking engagement from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at Lake Michigan College, South Haven campus. John Wakefield speaking.

9 – Baseball: Boys junior varsity team against Bridgman Public Schools at 4 p.m.

9 – Tennis: Girls varisty team against Hackett Catholic Prep at 4:30 p.m.

11 – Michigan Flywheelers Museum: Black River Railroad project volunteer meeting at 10 a.m.

11 – Soccer: Girls varsity team compete in the Shoreline Shootout beginning at 10 a.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

11 – Soccer: Girls junior varsity team compete in the Shoreline Shootout beginning at 10 a.m. at Northshore Elementary School.

13 – South Haven Garden Club: Meeting with guest speaker Nancy Ellis and Decoupage activity. Bring a pot or vase. Social time beginning at 12:30 p.m. with the general meeting beginning at 1 p.m.

13 – Soccer: Girls junior varsity team against Berrien County Homeschool at 5 p.m.

13 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against Lawton High School at 5 p.m.

13 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against St. Joseph High School at 6:15 p.m.

13 – Soccer: Girls varsity team against Lawton High School at 6:30 p.m.

14 – Baseball: Boys junior varsity team at 4 p.m.

14 – Track: Middle school boys and girls teams at the SAC Quad at 4:30 p.m.

14 – Softball: Girls junior varsity team against Watervliet High School at 4:30 p.m.

15 – Golf: Boys junior varsity team compete in the SAC JV Jam at 4 p.m. Hawkshead.

15 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against Otsego High School at 4:15

15 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against Berrien County Homeschool at 5:15 p.m.

15 – Track: Boys and girls varsity teams compete in the SAC Tri with Bridgman and Gobles schools at 4:30 p.m.

16 – Softball: Girls varsity team against Mattawan High School at 4 p.m.

16 – Soccer: Girls junior varsity team against Berrien Springs High School at 5 p.m.

16 – Soccer: Girls varsity soccer against Berrien Springs High School at 6:30 p.m.

17 – South Haven Memorial Library: Messy Play Fridays for preschoolers from 11 a.m. to noon.

21 – Scott Club: Journey to the End of the World – The Falkland Islands, South Georgia and Antartica. Location to be determined. Begins at 1 p.m.

21 – Baseball: Boys varsity team against Coloma High School at 4 p.m.

21 – Softball: Girls varsity team against Coloma High School at 4 p.m.

21 – Tennis: Girls varsity team against Black River Public School at 4:30 p.m.

22 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

23 – Tennis: Girls varsity team against Allegan Public Schools at 4:30 p.m.

24: South Haven Memorial Library: Parent Cafe from 11 a.m. to noon.

25 – Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: "Invasive Species: What to Know Before You Start Planting" with Jena Johnson from the Van Buren Conservation District from 10 to 11:30 a.m.

25 – South Haven Memorial Library: Astronomy Club at 11 a.m.

27 – Golf: Boys varsity team compete in the SAC Jam at 4 p.m. at Hawkshead.

27 – Track: Boys and girls teams compete in the SAC Tri with Allegan and Coloma schools at 4:30 p.m.

27 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against Bloomingdale High School at 5 p.m.

27 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against Coloma High School at 6:15 p.m.

28 – Track: Boys and girls middle school teams compete in the SAC Quad at 4:30 p.m.

28 – Baseball: Boys varsity team against Watervliet High School at 4:30 p.m.

28 – Softball: Girls varsity team against Watervliet High School at 4:30 p.m.

29 – Soccer: Girls junior varsity team against Hartford Public School at 5 p.m.

29 – Soccer: Girls middle school team against Bridgman Public School at 5 p.m.

29 –Soccer: Girls middle school team against Plainwell Schools at 6:15 p.m.

29 – Soccer: Girls varsity team against Bridgman Public Schools at 6:30 p.m.

30 – South Haven Speaker Series: Ambassador Bridget Brink speaking on "Why Ukraine and Eastern Europe Matter." Refreshments available at 6:30 p.m. Program begins at 7 p.m. at Lake Michigan College, South Haven campus.

30 – Softball: Girls junior varsity team against Harper Creek High School at 4 p.m.

30 – Baseball: Boys junior varsity team against Hopkins High School at 4 p.m.

30 – Tennis: Girls varsity team against Galesburg-Augusta High School at 4:30 p.m.

Florida man gets prison for Michigan campaign signature fraud scheme

By KARA BERG
The Detroit News (TNS)

MOUNT CLEMENS, Mich. — A Florida man has been sentenced to spend at least two years in prison for his role in a signature fraud scheme that kept the names of multiple judicial and gubernatorial candidates off the August 2022 primary ballot in Michigan.

Willie Reed was sentenced Tuesday to two to 15 years in prison and will have to pay more than $333,000 in restitution to Perry Johnson's campaign strategist and candidates Ryan Kelley, James Craig and Michael Markey, but he will not have to serve the sentence until his appeal works its way through the courts.

Reed was found guilty Feb. 9 of forging or allowing the forgery of signatures on nominating petitions and defrauding the August 2022 Republican gubernatorial campaigns of Johnson, Craig and Markey. He also was convicted of stealing from Kelley's gubernatorial campaign.

His co-defendant, Shawn Wilmoth, was sentenced to four to 20 years in prison for similar acts. Wilmoth's wife, Jamie Wilmoth, was acquitted of all charges.

Assistant Attorney General Chris Kessel said at the start of the trial Jan. 28 that the Wilmoths and Reed own businesses that hire people to collect signatures that allow candidates for public office to get their names put on the ballot.

He said they allowed for the falsification of signatures on these nominating petitions, as 68 percent of the citizen signatures submitted to the state Board of Electors were found to be false.

Reed was convicted of one count of conducting a criminal enterprise, three counts of election law forgery, two counts of false pretense of $100,000 or more, two counts of false pretenses over $50,000, one counts of false pretenses over $20,000, four counts of using a computer to commit fraud and one count of larceny between $1,000 and $20,000.

Reed was found not guilty of five counts of election fraud, one count of false pretense of $100,000 or more, two counts of false pretenses over $20,000, and five counts of using a computer to commit fraud.

Reed maintained his innocence Tuesday, but told Maceroni he was "very sorry for everything that happened."

"You've got to take responsibility for things that happen on your watch," Reed said. "I didn't do it, I know in my heart of hearts I feel like I didn't do anything ... but I will say I'm sorry for what happened. It never should have got this far. I should have come up here and been more involved. I trusted somebody else to do the job and now I'm here."

Blake said he did not think Reed's criminal intent to defraud was proven.

"I think this is more so a situation of negligence, to which my client was overwhelmed at the last-minute flurry of individuals seeking to be elected, or at least get on the ballot," Blake said, noting the signature-collecting industry is unregulated and there is no way to vet who is working for companies. "It needs to change. I think my client is a victim of that."

Macomb Circuit Court Judge James Maceroni allowed Reed to be released on bond pending his appeal because of the "unusual" nature of the case.

Gubenatorial candidate Johnson wrote in a victim impact statement read by Assistant Attorney General Chris Kessel that this was the single most traumatizing experience in his life. He said the "ramifications have been devastating."

"Our system of government is based on fair competition," Johnson said. "As much as I have suffered, it's the voters of Michigan who have suffered the most. ... Every voter in this state was a victim of their fraud."

Maceroni spent several minutes speaking about how lawmakers may need to examine the process to get on a ballot. He noted if every candidate was paying someone to gather signatures for them, he did not know if getting a certain amount of signatures made someone more or less appropriate to be on the ballot.

He also emphasized that this fraud did not have anything to do with President Donald Trump and others' claims that the 2020 election was stolen.

"This was an operation motivated by financial reasons, not political reasons, nor did it have anything to do with invalid votes," Maceroni said.

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FOCUS

The world's great fish migrations are collapsing – that's a problem for millions of people

By ZEB HOGAN
Professor of Biology, University of Nevada, Reno (The Conversation)

Hidden beneath the surface of the world's rivers, some of Earth's great animal movements unfold – migrations that rival, in sheer biomass, the famous mass movements of zebra and wildebeest across the Serengeti.

For centuries, fish migrations were as predictable as the seasons. Salmon, sturgeon, giant catfish and many other species moved through rivers in vast numbers, guided by rising water, flood pulses and evolved biological cues.

These species are extraordinarily diverse, ranging from beluga sturgeon – massive fish that can live for more than a century and produce the world's most prized caviar – to giant river carp, tropical eels, gold-flecked shad and goliath catfish, all of which travel to survive, in some cases over hundreds or even thousands of miles.

Their journeys can span continents. But the fish and their migrations are disappearing.

For most migratory fish, movement is not optional; it is how they survive. When dams block routes, when fishing intensifies at migratory bottlenecks and when floodplains and spawning grounds are cut off or degraded, most migratory fish do not simply go somewhere else. They cannot. First the migration thins, then it falters. In some rivers, especially those blocked by dams, it disappears altogether.

A new global assessment I led for the March 2026 international meeting of parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals provides the clearest picture yet of this decline – and what's needed to stop it.

My co-authors and I reviewed more than 15,000 species of freshwater fish, identified which of them migrate, and assessed their conservation status, or risk of extinction. We then focused on migratory species with declining populations and identified those where countries will have to work together to help them recover and thrive.

The results are sobering.

We identified 325 migratory freshwater fish species as candidates for coordinated international conservation actions under the Convention on Migratory Species treaty. Many of the largest species, the giants that make the longest and most dramatic journeys, are in the most trouble. Among migratory fish already listed under the Convention on Migratory Species, 97 percent are at risk of extinction. In Asia, populations of migratory freshwater megafish have declined by over 95 percent since 1970.

The disappearing giants of the Mekong

For the past 25 years, I have studied the world's largest freshwater fish as a biologist at the University of Nevada, Reno; host of Nat Geo Wild's Monster Fish documentary series; and the Convention on Migratory Species councilor for freshwater fish.

One of these extraordinary animals, the Mekong giant catfish, grows to more than 650 pounds. It once migrated hundreds of miles along the Mekong River, supporting fisheries and cultural traditions across the region. Today it is critically endangered because dams are blocking its route to spawning grounds and overfishing at migration bottlenecks is killing the large adults that the population depends on.

In Cambodia, small migratory fish known as trey riel are so significant that they gave their name to the national currency. In South Asia, one migratory shad, the hilsa, is so culturally important that it is sometimes given as a wedding gift, wrapped in ornate cloth and adorned with flowers.

Migrations of these fish, like migrations of buffalo on the American plains once did, shape ecosystems, livelihoods and culture. In the Mekong Basin alone, fisheries produce over 2 million metric tons of food each year, helping to feed tens of millions of people. When these fish disappear, people suffer.

Long migrations under threat

Declines are unfolding in other great river systems as well.

In the Amazon, some of the largest catfish on Earth migrate across much of the continent. The dorado, or gilded catfish, can reach six and a half feet (2 meters) in length and complete a migration of more than 6,000 miles (10,000 kilometers) between Andean headwaters and coastal nurseries, the longest freshwater fish migration ever recorded.

At Teotônio Rapids between Bolivia and Brazil, fishers once hung from wooden scaffolding above turbulent waters to spear dorado as they surged upstream – until the rapids were flooded by new dams. Altered river flows, barriers and overfishing are increasingly disrupting these journeys, and dorado populations in upstream Bolivia have plummeted.

Across the Northern Hemisphere, migratory fish such as salmon, sturgeon and shad have suffered major losses because rivers have been dammed and polluted, while many populations were heavily overfished.

In the Columbia River basin, dam construction transformed an immense river system into a series of dams and reservoirs and blocked fish from large parts of their historical range.

In South Asia, fish such as mahseer, goonch catfish and hilsa are also declining under pressure from dams, overharvesting, sand mining, pollution and habitat loss, even as they remain central to fisheries and river cultures across the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Indus basins.

Why migratory fish are struggling

Migratory freshwater fish depend on long, connected river corridors, often across multiple countries. Dams, habitat fragmentation, pollution, overfishing and climate-driven changes are breaking those connections. Once routes are cut, populations can collapse quickly.

This is increasingly an international problem. More than 250 rivers and lakes worldwide cross national borders, and about 47 percent of Earth's land surface lies within shared river basins. Yet freshwater fish are still too often managed at a local or national scale, as if rivers and fish movements stop at political boundaries.

That is why international agreements matter. The Convention on Migratory Species is the only global treaty specifically designed to encourage countries to work together to conserve migratory animals.

For freshwater fish, cooperation can begin with something as simple as countries sharing data and can extend to coordinated actions to reduce overharvesting, protect floodplains and spawning grounds, and keep rivers connected. The most fundamental solution is to manage rivers as connected ecological systems rather than as isolated national waterways.

Of the 325 species we identified as priorities, many could be considered for listing under the convention. Listing does not automatically save a fish, but it provides a mechanism to enable countries to coordinate monitoring, management and conservation across borders. That matters because freshwater fish remain underrepresented in international conservation policy, despite the scale of their decline.

We found that the river basins where international cooperation is now most urgently needed include the Amazon and La Plata-Paraná in South America, the Danube in Europe, the Mekong in Asia, the Nile in Africa and the Ganges-Brahmaputra in South Asia.

How to bring back migratory fish

Restoring migratory fish populations means keeping healthy rivers free-flowing, reconnecting rivers fragmented by dams and channelization, improving fisheries management, protecting floodplains and wetlands, and restoring habitats that have been drained, cleared or isolated by development.

There are examples of success. In Washington state, dam removals on the Elwha and White Salmon rivers reopened habitat that had been inaccessible for migrating fish for about a century, allowing Chinook, coho, steelhead and lamprey to return.

The world's great fish migrations have not disappeared everywhere, but they are fading. This new assessment offers a clearer picture of where international cooperation is most urgently needed. It is up to humanity to protect these extraordinary aquatic animals, which support millions of people enrich their lives, and make the world a more wondrous place.

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Murat Dogan / Getty Images

FOCUS

60 years of fiber optics

How a carrier of light you can't see underlies much of the modern world

By JOHN BALLATO
Professor of Materials Science and Engineering, Clemson University (The Conversation)

Imagine a world without internet, email, streaming services or social media. Imagine having to write letters or call everyone on a rotary dial phone to communicate. Imagine having to drive to a store to buy anything and everything. Unthinkable, right?

You can thank fiber optics for all these conveniences and more. And while you're at it, wish the fiber a happy 60th birthday in 2026.

As a materials scientist who has worked with fiber optics for over 30 years, I've seen how useful they are, and how scientists are working to improve them.

What are fiber optics?

Fiber optics are hair-thin strands of glass that confine and carry light. Information encoded on that light is how we communicate, watch movies, buy things and stay connected.

To carry information over long distances, the fiber must be extraordinarily clear. The magic behind an optical fiber's transparency is a combination of material science and manufacturing. As the light journeys along the fiber, little by little, some scatters off the glass molecules themselves and is lost. In modern fiber optics, this loss is so small that light can travel hundreds of miles and still be seen.

Carrying information in the form of light over long distances requires the fiber to act like a mirror. This way it can bounce those bits of light around corners when the fiber is bent, as it might be when strung like electrical wire inside a building.

Optical fibers comprise an inner core surrounded by an outer layer called a cladding, both made from glass. Protective plastic layers surround these glass parts and keep the fiber remarkably strong. The core glass is made from a material that has a slightly higher refractive index than the cladding.

You can think of the refractive indexlike density. A denser material has more atoms or molecules for its size, so it takes the light longer to travel through it. The refractive index measures this slowing of light inside a material.

In such a design, light undergoes "total internal reflection," bouncing off the core-clad interface. A remarkable feature of this phenomenon is that the glasses comprising both the core and clad are transparent, but when sandwiched together, light impinging on that interface at certain angles reflects off like a perfect mirror. So how are these special types of glass made?

THE CONVERSATION

A simple science

In the age of quantum technologies and AI, sometimes sophistication comes best from simplicity.

The optical fibers that wire our world are predominantly made from silicon dioxide, which also makes up beach sand. However, while chemically the same, beach sand is made up of tiny crystals of quartz that have been pulverized by geological weathering and the pounding of ocean waves. These natural origins riddle beach sand with impurities that can absorb light.

Manufacturers create fiber optic silicon dioxide, called silica, by chemically reacting gases that contain silicon with oxygen, leading to an ultrapure glass. This is all done using a process called chemical vapor deposition, where the reacted gases create layers of glass that build into the form of a rod. Typically, pure silica is used for the layers that make up the core and cladding, though to get a higher refractive index in the core, researchers add small amounts of other glass components to the silica. The finished rod is called a "blank" or "preform."

That rod, containing both core and clad, is then heated and pulled into a thin fiber. Think of pulling on a wad of gum in your mouth – that thin strand is like the fiber, except scientists slowly lower the big preform into the furnace and pull out the small fiber quickly.

Another beauty of glass is that it controllably softens with temperature. This permits us scientists to reliably pull fiber from the preform rod that already has the core and clad built into it.

Billions of miles of fiber optics have been made for global communications, and it all conforms to a diameter of 125 micrometers – one millionth of a meter – with a tolerance typically less than about one micrometer.

That level of material purity and manufacturing control makes fiber optics a modern marvel. But fiber optics haven't always been this advanced – it took time to get to this level of purity and control.

The trivergence

Three events took place within roughly a 10-year span that paved the way for today's fiber optics.

In 1960, physicist Ted Maiman developed the laser by building on its 1950s predecessor, the maser. In 1966, 60 years ago, experiments by engineers George Hockham and Charles Kao tested the transparency of various materials along with some light-guiding structures. They determined that a glass fiber could, in theory, carry light over the span of at least a kilometer.

While that distance might not sound too good today, other communication systems at the time were losing far more signal strength.

The trick was to make the glass clean enough. With this finding, Hockham and Kao started a global race to make optical fiber that exceeded this level of transparency.

By 1970, scientists from Corning Inc. used chemical vapor deposition to make a fiber breaking Kao's mark. With both these highly transparent fibers and more mature lasers to create light pulses, long-distance optical communication was born.

From 1970 to today, the clarity of fiber has continued to improve, becoming over 100 times clearer now and allowing networks to connect the world. For "groundbreaking achievements concerning the transmission of light in fibers for optical communication," Charles Kao was awarded the 2009 Nobel Prize in physics.

Through the looking glass

Glass lets a lot of visible light through – you can tell by looking out your window. But interestingly, it is even clearer at colors, called wavelengths, that are invisible to the human eye. Fiber optics used in communication networks operate at a wavelength of light of about 1.55 micrometers, between 50 and 100 times smaller than a human hair. At this infrared wavelength, the interaction of the light with the silica glass is disappearingly small.

Billions of miles of fiber optics have been made since the 1970s and installed globally for communications. But the technology's small size and weight, coupled with its high strength, flexibility and transparency, make fiber optics useful for many other applications.

Today, fiber optics are used as sensors for geologic events, such as earthquakes, as monitors for infrastructure, including bridges, roads and buildings, and as conduits for imaging and laser treatments inside the body. Optical fibers are also used as the source of light within the fiber lasers employed worldwide for machining, manufacturing, defense and security – to name just a few.

It's remarkable how something that hardly interacts with light can underpin most of our human interactions. Fiber optics use light you can't see to enable things most people cannot live without.

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Freaked out by the news?

Tips for staying calm from ex-refugees, hostages and 'uncertainty experts'

By DEBORAH VANKIN
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

War in Iran. Sleeper cells. Soaring gas prices. A new virus. ICE arrests. The acceleration of AI. And a rogue food delivery robot. Is your heart racing yet?

Amid one of the highest-stakes, most chaotic news cycles in recent memory, it's hard to keep calm while scrolling through the day's doom-saturated headlines.

Fear not. A team of British scientists, two authors and a group of thought leaders once deemed societal outcasts are here to help. Sam Conniff and Katherine Templar-Lewis' new book, "The Uncertainty Toolkit: Worry Less and Do More by Learning to Cope With the Unknown," presents evidence-based strategies to help you not only tolerate uncertainty, but thrive in the face of it.

Conniff, a self-described author and "social entrepreneur," and Templar-Lewis, a neuroscientist, partnered with the University College London's Centre for the Study of Decision-Making Uncertainty as well as real world "uncertainty experts" – former prisoners, drug addicts, hostages, refugees and others – to execute the most extensive study to date on "Uncertainty Tolerance," which published in 2022. Their web project, "Uncertainty Experts," is an interactive "self development experience" that includes workshops and an online Netflix-produced documentary, through which viewers can test their own uncertainty tolerance.

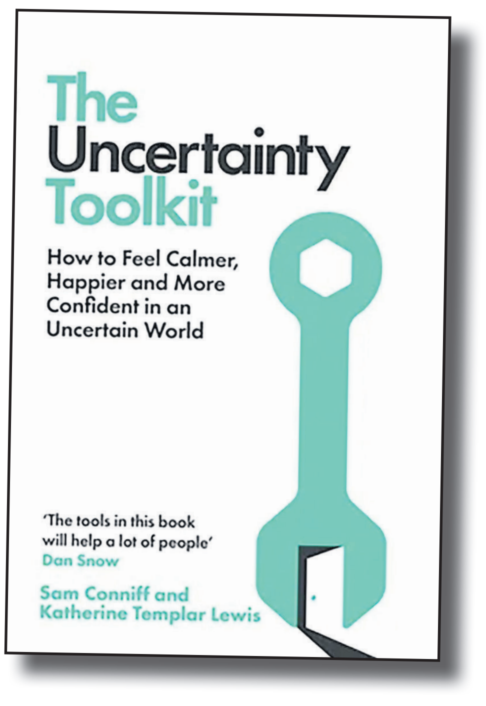
Their "Uncertainty Toolkit" book, out April 7, addresses the three emotional states that uncertainty puts us in – Fear, Fog and Stasis – while blending personal stories from the subjects they interviewed with the latest science on uncertainty, interactive exercises and guided reflections.

"We are scientifically in the most uncertain times," Templar-Lewis says. "There's something called the World Uncertainty Index, which charts uncertainty [globally]. And it's spiking. People say life has always been uncertain, and of course it has; but because of the way we're connected and on digital platforms and our lives are so busy, we're interacting with more and more moments of uncertainty than ever before."

We asked the authors to relay three strategies for staying calm in challenging times, as told to them by their uncertainty experts.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

■ Advice from an ex-addict: Be grateful:Morgan Godvin is an ex-addict and human rights activist from Oregon who served four years of a five-year sentence in a federal prison, Conniff says.


The Uncertainty Toolkit
How to Feel Calmer, Happier and More Confident in an Uncertain World
'The tools in this book will help a lot of people'
Dan Snow
Sam Conniff and Katherine Templar Lewis

Bluebird / Pan Macmillan / TNS

"The Uncertainty Toolkit" aims to help you keep calm amid chaos.

"She developed a practice of 'Radical Gratitude.' Even in a world that feels so overwhelming, we can all find an object from which to derive a sense of gratitude," he says. "As an emotion, gratitude provides a counterweight to anxiety that is almost as powerful as breath work or any of the other [anti-anxiety] well-known interventions."

In prison, Godvin – who suffers from anxiety – created a daily practice to help her cope. "She began being grateful for the blankets, the only thing she had – and they were threadbare blankets," Conniff says. "And by digging deep and really emphasizing the warm sensation we know of as gratitude, it became a biological hack. When the body starts to feel grateful, the hormones the body releases brings it back into what's known as homeostasis or a sense of equilibrium; it activates the parasympathetic nervous system. It's a very humbling and very healthy practice when the world's just too much."

■ Advice from a survivor of suicidal depression: L ean into the unknown.Vivienne Ming is a leading neuroscientist based in the Bay Area who faced a web of personal challenges in her early 20s. Ming, who was assigned male at birth, dropped out of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, became homeless and was "living out of their car with a gun on their dashboard," Conniff says. "They faced homelessness and near suicidal depression before finding a path that took them through gender transition to a place of real identity, marriage, family and success as a scientist."

How? They developed and cultivated an awareness of "negativity bias," Conniff says. "We all have a predetermined negativity bias. And in times of uncertainty, that negativity bias goes off the charts and we start to limit ourselves and shut ourselves down. By understanding this, we begin to be able to make a choice: Am I shutting myself down to the opportunities of life? Am I not getting back to people? Am I not taking the chances that are presented to me?"

What's more, uncertainty, Dr. Ming pointed out, is actually good for you. It unlocks parts of your brain.

"Uncertainty drives neuroplasticity, our ability to learn," Conniff says. "So [it's about] resisting negativity bias – that this is all dangerous and difficult and we're told not to trust each other – and instead, Dr. Ming's response is to lean into the unknown. She says 'the best way forward is to all walk slowly into the deep end of our own lives.'"

■ Advice from an ex-refugee: Reflect on your gut. Rez Gardi grew up in a refugee camp in Pakistan, before her family relocated to New Zealand. She's now a lawyer and human rights activist working in Iraq.

"Rez correctly identified the scientific explanation for what we all call 'gut instinct,'" Conniff says. "It's known as 'embodied cognition.' The idea is that we have two brains – the gut instinct is an incredibly complex system of data points and it literally is in our gut and it's connected to our brains via the vagus nerve. What it does is it brings your intuition in line with your intellect."

So how to tap into it? "Rez talked about reflecting on her gut instinct," Conniff says. "So when you have a feeling that you are right or wrong, go back to that feeling: What color was it? What shape was it? Where was it in your body? What temperature was it? Rez honed her gut instinct to become incredibly accurate: Should she trust this person? Was she safe? And that gut instinct became a highly tuned instrument. When we are trying to solve problems, when we are trying to communicate, these signals are as accurate as the best of our cognitive problem-solving abilities."

Conniff and Templar-Lewis spoke to nearly 40 uncertainty experts in all. And with all of them, Conniff adds, "they kind of learned these techniques themselves, but the scientific evidence really backs it up."

HEALTH

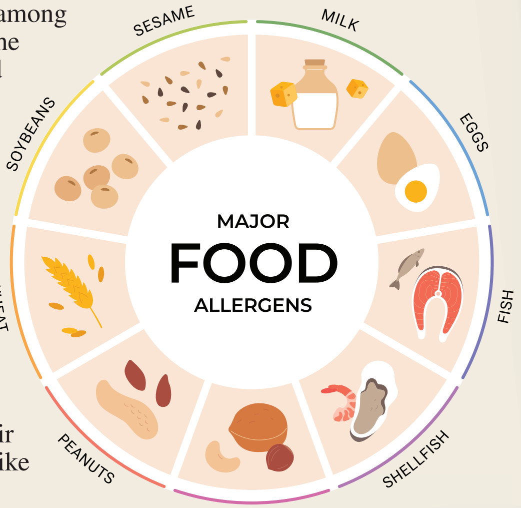
ASK THE PEDIATRICIAN

Managing food allergies at school

By **SONJA O'LEARY,** MD, FAAP and **MICHAEL PISTINER,** MD, MMSc, FAAP
American Academy of Pediatrics (TNS)

About 1 in every 10 children and teens in the U.S. has a food allergy, an abnormal immune response to a specific food. That's roughly two kids per classroom.

Food allergies have risen by 50 percent since the 1990s. With this in mind, the American Academy of Pediatrics advocates for the health of all children who must avoid certain foods to stay healthy.



AAP believes that a team approach among parents, pediatricians and schools is the best way to ensure that kids with food allergies can stay safe at school. State and federal laws can make this partnership even more effective. For example, many states have authorized schools to keep open stocks of epinephrine on hand so they can treat any child showing signs of an allergy flare-up, whether or not a prescription has been issued.

The immune system normally protects the body by fighting off germs like bacteria and viruses, but when someone has a food allergy, their immune system treats a certain food like it's a harmful germ.

While 90 percent of food allergies involve exposure to the top nine allergens (peanuts, tree nuts, dairy/milk, eggs, sesame, wheat, soy, fish and shellfish), people can be allergic to many other foods. Even small amounts of a food allergen can cause a reaction that can be very serious.

Avoiding allergic reactions means being prepared for allergic emergencies – wherever and whenever they might happen, including at school. Since kids spend roughly 1,000 hours at school each year, it's essential to ensure they are safe, supported and ready to learn.

Getting a food allergy diagnosis is an important first step. Your health care team will ask detailed questions about the reaction including signs and symptoms your child experienced, as well as the timing of the reaction.

Your doctor can use specific testing to help confirm a food allergy. They may also recommend that your child be evaluated by a board-certified allergist. Allergists can perform skin testing and an oral food challenge, if needed, to confirm a food allergy diagnosis. This can also help keep a child from having an overly restricted diet, while avoiding the foods that truly cause a reaction.

If your child is diagnosed with a food allergy, it's important to have a clear plan to help them stay safe – especially at school. This includes knowing which foods to avoid and being prepared in case of an emergency. They'll need an allergy and anaphylaxis emergency plan.

Kids eat meals, snacks and treats during the school day, so having a system to prevent accidental exposures to food allergens is important. School staff should be trained on cross contact protocols and ensure all eating utensils are properly stored and washed to prevent contact with potential allergens that could trigger a reaction when used by a child with an allergy. Staff should also discourage children from sharing snacks and encourage them to eat only the food intended for them.

Although eating an allergen is the most common and important trigger of severe allergic reactions, there are also other ways to come in contact with a food allergen. Some classroom materials may contain hidden food allergens such as play dough with wheat or finger paints that contain milk proteins. These products don't always list their ingredients. So it's a good idea to ask your child's teacher or school staff about the materials they use. Let them know about your child's allergies so they can help keep your child safe.

Rarely, food allergens can get into the air. For example, steam from cooking or powders used in class can be breathed in and cause a reaction. A child's skin usually does a good job keeping allergens out of the body. But if they touch a food allergen with their finger and then put it in their mouth, they can have a reaction.

Schools and students can follow simple steps to avoid these types of reactions, such as hand washing, and surface and dishware/utensil cleaning. As students get older, they can gradually take on more responsibility. You can also coach your child to ask for help when they feel allergy symptoms starting

If they are exposed to an allergen, the child can have a reaction called anaphylaxis, which can progress quickly and can be life-threatening. Serious allergic reactions like anaphylaxis are reported in about 1 out of every 15 schools in the United States each year.

It's important to recognize the signs of anaphylaxis right away. Using epinephrine early – before the reaction gets worse – can keep a reaction from becoming life-threatening. That's why having an allergy and anaphylaxis emergency care plan is so helpful. Ideally, your doctor will create one for your child right when they are diagnosed with a food allergy, at the beginning of the school year, and when the allergy list changes.

Some schools also use an Individualized Health Care Plan (IHCP) – a nursing document that outlines how your child's allergy will be managed throughout the school day.

Because food allergies can interfere with breathing and restrict diet, your child may qualify for special accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. A 504 plan is a legally binding document that ensures your child can safely participate in their daily activities at school alongside their peers. It also provides legal protections if the school is unable to meet your child's needs.

To help your child stay safe, give their school an Allergy and Anaphylaxis Emergency Plan signed by your child's doctor, any school-specific forms required to give your child medicine, and epinephrine to treat potential reactions.

Sonja O'Leary, MD, FAAP, is an Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. She is currently the Chair for Ambulatory Pediatrics and School and Community Programs. Michael Pistiner, MD, MMSc, FAAP, is a pediatric allergist and the Director of Food Allergy Advocacy, Education and Prevention at Mass General for Children, Harvard Medical School.

Avoiding allergic reactions means being prepared for allergic emergencies. Since kids spend roughly 1,000 hours at school each year, it's essential to ensure they are safe, supported and ready to learn.

SELL BY
OPEN
VITAMIN A & D
Chocolate
Low Fat Milk
1% Milkfat
From cows not treated with the growth hormone rBST*
1/3 QUART (315mL)

MILK
MILK
TO OPEN

VITAMIN D
Milk
1/3 QUART (315mL)
OPEN
SELL BY

MILK
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TO OPEN

Food allergies have risen by 50 percent since the 1990s. With this in mind, the American Academy of Pediatrics advocates for the health of all children who must avoid certain foods to stay healthy. Photos from Getty Images

Marcin Zdrojewski / Dreamstime / TNS

MAYO CLINIC Q&A

Why is fiber good for your health?

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK (TNS)

DEAR MAYO CLINIC: Fiber has been getting a lot of attention in the news lately. What exactly is dietary fiber, and why is it important to my overall health?

ANSWER: Dietary fiber refers to the parts of plant-based foods that your body can't digest or break down. Unlike proteins, fats or simple carbohydrates, fiber passes through the digestive system largely intact. Because your body can't digest it, fiber becomes an important fuel source for the trillions of microbes that live in your gut.

As food moves through the digestive tract, nutrients your body can absorb are taken up earlier in the process. What remains – much of which is fiber – travels to the colon, where gut bacteria use it for energy.

Dietary fiber is often associated with digestion, but its role in the body goes far beyond keeping you regular. Fiber plays an important part in gut, heart, immune and metabolic health. Research shows that adequate fiber intake helps:

■ Lower cholesterol levels and reduce blood pressure.

■ Improve blood sugar control, aiding in the prevention and management of type 2 diabetes.

■ Decrease the risk of colorectal cancer, stroke and chronic inflammation.

■ Manage a healthy weight.

■ Regulate immune responses.

■ Maintain a healthy and diverse gut microbiome, which supports many aspects of overall health.

Fiber is often described as soluble or insoluble, based on whether it dissolves in water or not. However, this distinction is less important for overall health than how fiber functions in the body. A more meaningful way to think about fiber is whether it's fermentable or nonfermentable. Here's what this means:

■ Fermentable fiber can be broken down by gut microbes and used as fuel. This process produces beneficial compounds, such as short-chain fatty acids.

■ Nonfermentable fiber isn't readily used by microbes and mainly adds bulk to your stool, which helps support regular bowel movements.

While you may hear about the benefits of taking supplements to add fiber to your diet, but fiber is best obtained from food rather than supplements. That's because many whole foods contain a mix of different fibers, which is especially beneficial for gut health. Fiber-rich foods include:

■ Fruits, such as berries, pears and apples.

■ Vegetables, like broccoli, Brussels sprouts and leafy greens.

■ Legumes, including lentils, chickpeas and beans.

■ Nuts and seeds, such as almonds, chia seeds and flax seeds.

■ Whole grains, including whole-wheat bread, oats and wheat bran.

It's important to eat a variety of these foods. The more different types of fiber-rich foods you eat, the more different types of fiber you'll get, which is optimal for your health. Making small, sustainable changes, such as choosing whole-grain bread instead of white bread or swapping chips for nuts or fruit, can add up over time.

Eat a variety of fiber-rich foods Most adults who are in good health should aim for 30 to 40 grams of fiber per day. However, your fiber needs can vary by age and general health. For example, older adults may need to balance fiber intake with adequate calories and protein.

As you increase your fiber intake, you may experience some abdominal discomfort, bloating and gas. To prevent or lessen these symptoms, gradually add more fiber to your diet rather than increasing your intake all at once. A helpful approach is to:

■ Increase fiber intake by about 3 grams per week. This can be as easy as adding just 1/2 cup peas, squash or cauliflower; 1 cup carrots; 1 medium sweet potato; 1 cup brown rice; 3 tablespoons of shredded coconut; or 2 tablespoons of sesame seeds.

■ Maintain that level for seven to 10 days before increasing again.

■ Drink plenty of water, aiming for 80 ounces a day.

Slowly increasing your fiber intake allows your digestive system and gut microbes time to adapt, and any symptoms will improve after a short while.

Fiber is an essential part of a healthy diet. By eating a variety of plant-based foods, increasing fiber intake gradually and staying well hydrated, you can support gut health and overall well-being while making fiber goals more achievable and sustainable.

– Purna Kashyap, M.B.B.S.,
Gastroenterology, Mayo Clinic,
Rochester, Minnesota

Three things to know about cancer and your heart

Mayo Clinic expert shares tips to reduce risk

Dreamstime / TNS

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK (TNS)

ROCHESTER, Minn. — As cancer therapies improve and increasingly achieve cures or recurring periods of remission, preventing and managing damage to organs from cancer treatment has become a top concern. That includes injury to the heart, says Joerg Herrmann, M.D., a cardiologist and the founder and director of the Cardio-Oncology Clinic at Mayo Clinic in Minnesota.

As physicians and researchers work to prevent, diagnose and treat heart damage from cancer therapies, they also have learned about connections between cancer and the heart that go beyond the cardiac effects of cancer treatments. Dr. Herrmann shares three things to know:

A web of risk factors'

Cancer and heart disease have common risk factors, Dr. Herrmann says. Those include lifestyle habits.

"We call it the web of risk factors. Some of the very same lifestyle-related factors can set patients up for both cancer and cardiovascular disease," he explains. " Smoking is a prime example. It increases the risk of lung and other cancers and coronary artery disease, heart attacks and peripheral artery disease."

In addition to not smoking, you can reduce your risk of cancer and of heart disease by achieving a healthy weight; avoiding or moderating alcohol use; controlling cholesterol (some cancer treatments can worsen cholesterol levels); getting enough sleep; and adopting a healthy diet with fruit and vegetables, he adds.

Physical activity is another important factor. It has been shown to reduce heart damage risk during cancer treatment, help prevent cancer recurrence and improve cardiovascular outcomes, Dr. Herrmann says.

"The more elements of a healthy lifestyle you meet, the better your health projection is for the heart and cancer," he says. "You will reduce the risks of two of the leading killers and increase life expectancy."

Cancer and heart disease can actually be risk factors for each other.

"We've realized that the relationship between cancer and heart disease works in both directions," Dr. Herrmann says. "Cancer itself can impact the cardiovascular system apart from cancer therapies, and vice versa. Patients with heart failure or other cardiovascular diseases have a higher risk of cancer."

A variety of things thatmay be done during cancer treatment to reduce risk to the heart

Which treatments are given and how can affect the risk of heart damage, Dr. Herrmann says. For example, the medical team may:

■ Use treatments that minimize harm to healthy tissue, such as targeted therapies or proton beam therapy.

■ Stagger certain chemotherapy drugs to give the heart a chance to heal between treatments.

■ Use medications that protect the heart during chemotherapy.

■ Use techniques to shield healthy tissue during radiation therapy, such as body positioning and breath-holding to provide greater separation between the tumor and the heart.

"These shielding efforts have come a long way for adults and children who have cancer," he says.

Artificial intelligence and wearables are promising innovations

The goals of Dr. Herrmann's research including developing tools that predict – before treatment – who is at high risk of heart damage from certain cancer therapies. This would enable shared decision making among patients and their care teams about the approach to treatment.

He and his colleagues are also working on therapies to mend hearts broken by chemotherapy and to develop easier and more cost-effective surveillance strategies for cardiovascular side effects of cancer therapies. Early detection and intervention are likely to lead to the best outcomes, Dr. Herrmann says.

The use of wearables and artificial intelligence (AI) can help, he says. Research has found, for example, that applying AI to an electrocardiogram, a test that measures the heart's electrical activity, may help detect a decline in heart function.

"We're interested in going further with AI technologies and developing simulations to show how different therapies would affect a given patient," Dr. Herrmann says.

Some patients remain at risk of heart disease for a lifetime after cancer treatment, but it's impractical to do echocardiograms to look at the heart for the rest of their lives. Wearables to alert cancer survivors and their care teams to cardiac abnormalities are another promising area of research, he says.

"We've come a long way in cardio-oncology. We have a much better understanding of what we can do to manage heart risk from cancer therapies," Dr. Herrmann says. "Patients are in much better place now than they were even 10 years ago."

FINANCE

The 'attorney model' loophole

How debt relief companies scam people seeking help

By NATALIE TODOROFF
Bankrate.com (TNS)

Debt settlement companies technically aren't allowed to charge fees until after lowering a consumer's debt. But a loophole in the Telemarketing Sales Rule – and a mish-mash of federal and state laws – allows predatory firms the opportunity for exploitation.

A growing corner of the $23 billion debt relief industry has used a workaround regulators have dubbed the "attorney model" – taking money to the tune of tens of millions of dollars from consumers, according to Consumer Financial Protection Bureau actions since 2010. In this scheme, settlement companies masquerade as law firms, sometimes "renting out" a law license – since lawyers are allowed to collect advance fees, this provides a nifty if questionable way for these companies to cash in before doing any work. More often than not, however, these companies don't actually connect consumers with attorneys.

Debt settlement is meant to fast track getting you out of the red when you're in debt. Instead of walking away with less debt, consumers who fall prey to the attorney model can end up with ruined credit and money spent out of pocket. That's what happened to Coya Davis, a 31-year-old ex-project manager in Atlanta.

Davis was almost $27,000 in credit card debt when she learned about the Clear Creek Legal Debt Resolution Program in November 2023. After enrolling, Davis received a welcome email from the company telling her she'd made a smart choice and, with its help, would have her debts negotiated, settled and resolved for a fraction of what she owed.

As is common practice, Clear Creek instructed Davis to stop paying her creditors and redirect her monthly payments into a trust account that could be later used for a settlement. It was the solution Davis thought she was looking for.

"My minimum payments felt too high," she says of her debt. "I wanted something that streamlined everything, maybe even a lump-sum option.

While you can "DIY" debt settlement, hiring a reputable debt settlement company to negotiate your balances can be helpful when you're juggling multiple creditors, interest rates and payment schedules. Though some firms can help consumers get out of debt sooner, others see financial anxiety as a means to line their own pockets. That's what happened to Davis: When she left Clear Creek's program, her debt was no lower than when she enrolled and her credit score had gone from the 700s to the 400s, she says. Davis was also out nearly $500, despite the clear Federal Trade Commission and CFPB rules that prohibit these companies from charging upfront fees.

The size of the debt settlement industry waxes and wanes, but it historically rebounds in high periods of financial stress. Although it currently remains below Great Recession levels, the U.S.-led global debt settlement market is expected to expand from $4.8 billion in 2024 to $7.2 billion by 2032, according to Credence Research, even though we're not in a recession.

For Davis, her debt was a result of losing one of her two jobs. With her income slashed in half, the bills began to pile up. "I felt overwhelmed," she says.

Debt settlement's legal loophole

If you hire a debt settlement firm, you're responsible for paying their fee once your account is settled – it's usually between 15 percent and 25 percent of the total debt you bring into the program. Enroll $50,000 in debt, and what you owe the settlement company can range from $7,500 to $12,500.

However, federal law limits when in the process those debt settlement companies can charge those fees. The Telemarketing Sales Rule, Consumer Financial Protection Act and state laws all work in tandem to ensure settlement companies aren't charging consumers until they've delivered actual results.

When Davis wanted to quit Clear Creek's program – she couldn't get straight answers about when her debt would be paid off, and she began to suspect she was being ripped off – she wanted all of her money back. She'd paid nearly $1,500 over three months. Clear Creek only returned $1,000, claiming it needed the rest to cover her account setup fees.

Dreamstime / TNS

Consumers who fall prey to the attorney model of debt settlement can end up with ruined credit and money spent out of pocket.

"It made no sense because the money was supposed to be in a pot they'd later use to pay creditors," says Davis. "But at that point, I chalked it up as a loss."

Clear Creek Legal Debt Resolution Program, whose website went dark in January 2026, had leveraged the loophole of acting as a law firm to charge upfront fees. The company did not respond to Bankrate's multiple calls and emails when its contact information was publicly available online.

Whenever Davis called Clear Creek, she never got the impression she was speaking to a lawyer.

"They were just a regular customer service agent, someone there to answer general questions," she tells Bankrate.

Andrew Pizor, senior attorney at the National Consumer Law Center, says he's even seen larger debt settlement companies outsource their customer service to other countries.

"The people actually doing the work on consumers' accounts are virtually never attorneys," he says. "The only attorneys involved are basically just lending their names to a letterhead." Pizor says the practice is called fronting your license. "They're doing it to exploit the loophole," he adds.

The only time Davis felt she was working with a legal entity was right after she enrolled, when Clear Creek sent a notary to her home to complete power of attorney paperwork, a routine part of the debt settlement process. Despite the word "attorney," the documents don't require a lawyer. (Granting a debt settlement company power of attorney simply allows it to communicate or negotiate with creditors on a consumer's behalf.)

Had Davis worked with a lawyer employed by Clear Creek, she could have gotten better advice. She might have been told, for example, that successful debt settlement typically involves being delinquent on your payments. Davis wasn't behind on her accounts and didn't realize that lessened her leverage in the settlement process. Clear Creek welcomed her with open arms anyway.

When Davis reflects on her poor fit for Clear Creek's services, she says it "pisses [her] off." She faced one of the consequences of debt settlement – major damage to her credit – without the promised upside of actually lowering her debt. That, and she paid almost $500 to do it.

"Falling behind on payments incurs credit score damage and late fees," adds Bankrate analyst Ted Rossman. "The typical tactic is to stop paying for a while and try to use that as leverage to settle for less than what you owe, but it trashes your credit."

The rise of the 'attorney model'

The attorney model was largely pioneered by Morgan Drexen and Legal Helpers Debt Resolution in 2007. Morgan Drexen's president and chief executive officer, Walter Ledda, was sued by the CFPB in 2013 for charging illegal upfront fees and misrepresenting its services to consumers. The CFPB complaint was resolved in 2016 after Morgan Drexen was ordered to pay nearly $132 million in restitution and a $40 million civil penalty.

Far from killing the attorney model, the Morgan Drexen case provided a blueprint for its evolution. A decade later, Strategic Financial Solutions would refine the scheme to an even larger scale.

In January 2024, the CFPB and seven state attorneys general filed a civil complaint against Strategic Financial Solutions alleging they operated a large-scale, deceptive debt relief scheme. In the complaint, the CFPB and state regulators accused SFS of allegedly enticing borrowers with misleading claims of legal aid or personal loans, only to steer them into debt relief programs that charged thousands of consumers more than $100 million in illegal upfront fees. In many cases, the lawsuit also alleges that no debt settlement ever occurred. (SFS was helmed by Ryan Sasson, the stepson of Stephen Drescher – who some might remember as the character Jonah Hill portrayed in Martin Scorsese's 2013 film "The Wolf of Wall Street," according to the New York Times.)

Running a company with dozens of subsidiary shell companies and bogus law firms isn't how a legitimate business operates, says Lynch.

"That's a structure designed from day one to rip people off," he adds. Pizor agrees, claiming that these companies exploit people who think they're getting genuine legal representation. "If you're calling up a debt settlement company, chances are, you're not doing well financially. You're already stressed out and vulnerable, and these companies take advantage of that," he says.

The CFPB complaint against SFS listed 29 corporate defendants and 17 "facade" law firms in the body of the complaint. Clear Creek – the firm Coya Davis used – wasn't named as a defendant in the initial complaint, but appeared as one of 24 such firms in the amended complaint. Bankrate reached out to 18 of those 24 law firms named with publicly available contact information but did not receive comment.

SFS argued in court that its advance-fee practices fell under an exemption in the Telemarketing Sales Rule for "face-to-face sales presentations," a position the government and courts have rejected. The Telemarketing Sales Rule allows upfront fees only after a genuine face-to-face sales presentation, but courts ruled that SFS's use of notaries to finalize paperwork didn't qualify because the sales pitch itself occurred remotely. In filings, SFS also asked the court to stay the preliminary injunction pending appeal, seeking to pause enforcement of the CFPB's order while it challenges the legal claims against it. The company's appeals were rejected and now, its assets are under the strict supervision of a court-appointed receiver.

In November 2025, SFS filed a motion to dismiss the case. If granted, the CFPB and attorneys general would effectively be back at square one.

Without regulatory oversight, relief scams can 'find a workaround'

The complaint against Strategic Financial Solutions is the prominent example of the attorney model, but it's far from the only one.

In 2024, consumers filed north of 34,000 complaints with the FTC against shoddy mortgage foreclosure relief and debt management companies. In total, consumers lost more than $82 million. Keep in mind, that's just what was reported.

The problem is, predatory settlement companies often move faster than the law can keep up with. That's why the debt settlement legal loophole, built by the so-called attorney model, hasn't completely closed.

"If they can't do one thing, they find a workaround," says longtime financial counselor Todd Christensen.

The regulatory environment is already loosened, thanks to President Trump's "One Big Beautiful Bill Act," which hobbled CFPB borrowing power when it was signed into law in July 2025. The Trump Administration has also announced plans to cut tens of millions from the FTC's budget, including an $18 million reduction to its Bureau of Consumer Protection.

The Trump administration has faced some pushback for weakening consumer protection agencies. In the NTEU v. Vought lawsuit, the CFPB employees' union is challenging whether the Trump administration has the legal authority to shut down a congressionally established agency without first passing new legislation that updates the law that created it. If the courts side with the administration, it would effectively grant the executive branch a green light to finish dismantling the CFPB from within.

With federal oversight cut off at its knees, it's up to the state attorneys general to keep debt settlement companies in check. But the process of doing so is tricky when settlement regulations vary widely across states and there are attorneys involved. Put simply, it takes a lot to get a state to take a complaint about an attorney's office seriously.

"State regulators can have a really narrow focus," says the NCLC's Pizor. "You really have to commit malpractice or steal from a client, or not respond to a client's phone calls to really trigger an investigation."

Pizor rarely sees regulators going after lawyers running scammy debt settlement companies. "I think it's a shame," he adds.

Currently, the Telemarketing Sales Rule requires debt settlement companies to self-report their own practices, which leaves additional room for bad actors to maneuver, especially at scale.

"You need regulators pulling random cases and seeing how they really went," the FCCA's Lynch says.

Consider your debt relief options with a discerning eye

While not every debt relief company or option is out to scam consumers, the bad apples run the risk of spoiling the industry. Bankrate interviewed two executives at reputable debt settlement companies who regret the toll that scams have played on its well-meaning goal, to help consumers strategically get out of debt. And sometimes, it actually works: companies resolved more than $2.8 billion in unsecured consumer debt in 2022, covering more than 1.2 million individual accounts, according to the American Association for Debt Resolution.

And yet, being able to pick out the bad apples is critical to avoiding the fate of people like Davis.

For Davis, one bad experience with debt settlement was more than enough to turn her off of it completely. After she walked away from Clear Creek, her bank recommended Money Management International (MMI), a nonprofit credit counseling agency, and its debt management plan (DMP).

With a DMP, you're still paying your creditors, but through a credit counseling agency and at reduced interest rates and late fees. The reduced interest means most of Davis's $386 bimonthly payments goes to principal, not interest.

Plus, Davis's credit score is back on the rise, even if she's paying fees – legitimate fees this time around.

How to spot a bad debt settlement company

Settlement isn't always a good idea. But for those considering it, Bankrate asked experts on both sides of the aisle – nonprofit credit counselors and those in the for-profit settlement industry – for some red flags to be mindful of when choosing a company. Here's what to watch out for:

■ Upfront fees: No debt settlement company should charge you fees until your debt has been settled. You only owe a settlement company money after a settlement agreement has been reached.

■ Unclear timelines: A reputable settlement company will walk you through how long the process takes from start to finish.

■ Guaranteed outcomes: Companies that advertise guaranteed savings or debt reductions should raise suspicion – there's no guarantee that your creditors will agree to settle.

■ Failure to disclose the risks: A good debt settlement company will walk you through the tax, credit and other implications of settling a debt before you enroll.

■ Pushy sales tactics: Reputable debt settlement companies don't pressure consumers with aggressive sales tactics, artificial deadlines or repeated follow-ups to force a quick decision.

■ Unsolicited outreach: A debt settlement company should not reach out to you – online, by phone, mail or otherwise – to get you to sign up. Reputable companies wait for individuals to seek help on their own, according to National Debt Relief executive Natalia Brown.

■ Offering secured debt settlement options: Only unsecured debts, such as credit card bills, phone bills and medical debts, can be settled. Secured debts, like those tied to a seizable asset like a car or house, aren't eligible for settlement.

■ False authority claims: Some settlement companies use official-sounding programs to advertise. "One I've been hearing more is 'Did you know that President So-and-So recently signed a bill saying you don't have to pay your credit card debts back?' " says Christensen. "Anytime you hear a pitch like that, avoid that company like the plague."

■ No accreditation: Debt settlement companies should be accepted by the Association for Consumer Debt Relief (ACDR), an industry association, says Brown. It can also be helpful to see if a company is accredited by the Better Business Bureau.

What to know about DMP fees

A debt management plan is also a slower process than settlement, tracked in years rather than months. When Davis first signed up in 2023, MMI predicted she'd complete the program by August 2028.

"I've already knocked that to January 2028, and with a few more accounts paid off, I might even finish in mid-2027," says Davis. She adds: "It feels good to work with a company that's actually helping me instead of hurting me, and to see real progress."

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Roast chicken provides the basics for dinners all week.

Radu Dumitrescu / Dreamstime / TNS

ONE ROAST (OR ROTISSERIE) CHICKEN WILL GIVE YOU THREE GREAT MEALS

By BETH DOOLEY
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

More than the sum of its juicy meat and crispy skin, a good roast chicken is all about those luscious pan juices. Whether you choose to roast the bird yourself or pick up a grocery store's rotisserie chicken, these juices – golden, sticky, salty – inspire sauces, soups and rice bowls, and provide an excuse to mop your plate with a hunk of sourdough bread.

As we march into spring, I cherish unfussy recipes that look after themselves. As the ingredients work their magic in the oven, I can focus on the changing seasons – cleaning, organizing, and eventually prepping the garden. It makes sense to roast two birds at once. The first for dinner and lunch the next day; the second to use for three or more entirely different meals down the road.

Over the years, I've roasted many chickens many different ways. Every cookbook offers a different method, each claiming to be the best: start the bird in a hot oven upside down; poach it first before roasting; use low, low heat for a long, long time (3 to 4 hours). But the method I rely on now sticks to the basics.

First, choose a good chicken (organic and free range), then salt and pepper it inside and out and set it in the refrigerator to brine overnight. This draws up moisture, adds taste, and helps ensure crisp skin. Bring the chicken to room temperature before roasting. Rub it all over with lots of butter (it is about the butter). Set the chicken in the pan with several cloves of garlic and potatoes, the essential accompaniment – they'll emerge wrinkled and richly seasoned.

Whether or not to baste remains up for debate. With enough butter, there is truly no need, but basting occasionally helps keep the meat succulent, the skin crackly brown. A few lemon slices over the breast makes a nice touch. Be sure to allow the chicken to rest for about 10 minutes before carving so the juices retreat into the meat.

Let's agree that a good rotisserie chicken is a fine option when long on hunger and short on time. Why not pick up two? The small amount of pan juices that collect on the bottom of the package are dark, thick, gooey and worth saving. Set the chicken in a roasting pan, add the pan juices, and top it with a few lemon slices before rewarming in a moderate oven. I've served this at a dinner party without admitting that I hadn't roasted the bird myself. No one complained.

That second roast chicken provides the basics for dinners the rest of the week; all you need are a few key pantry staples and little imagination. Here are three ideas:

Rice Bowl

In a heavy pot, heat 2 to 3 tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil over high heat, add ¼ cup chopped onion, ¼ cup chopped parsley, ¼ cup diced yellow peppers, 1 cup cherry tomatoes, and season with salt and pepper to taste. Cook until the tomatoes are blistered and shriveled and the peppers have softened, about 3 to 5 minutes. Stir in any remaining pan juices and 1 cup chicken stock or more as needed, 1 cup shredded chicken meat, and season with 1 to 2 teaspoons za'atar seasoning and 1 to 2 tablespoons lemon juice, to taste. Stir in 2 cups cooked white rice. Taste and adjust the seasoning.

Tostadas

For each tostada, pile ¼ cup shredded meat onto a deep-fried tortilla, add ¼ cup sliced red peppers and ¼ cup shredded queso fresco or mozzarella. Drizzle on any remaining pan juices and run the tostada under the broiler until the cheese is melty, about 2 to 4 minutes. Serve garnished with plenty of chopped cilantro; add a few lime wedges on the side.

Chicken stock

Save the bones from your chicken, put them into a pot, add enough cold water to cover by 1 inch, add half an onion, 1 carrot, 1 stalk celery, 1 bay leaf and any remaining pan juices. Set the pot over high heat, bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer until the stock is reduced and tasty, about 3 hours.

Remove and discard the bones and vegetables. Strain, and transfer to a covered container. Cool, cover and store in the refrigerator for up to a week or freeze.

Roast Chicken

Makes one roast chicken for 4 to 6 people

This meal will keep on giving for the next day or two. Why not roast two chickens while you're at it? Be sure to roast potatoes alongside for a one-pot meal. The secret? Butter, and lots of it!

1 large chicken (about 3 to 5 lb.)
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
6 tbsp. unsalted butter
1 lb. Yukon Gold or red potatoes, cut into ½-in. pieces
5 to 6 cloves garlic
3 to 4 lemon slices

Remove and discard the bag with chicken parts. Season the chicken inside and out with lots of coarse salt and freshly ground pepper. Set on a plate and refrigerate uncovered overnight. Bring the chicken to room temperature before roasting.

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Set the chicken, breast side up, in a roasting pan surround it with the potatoes and garlic. Rub the chicken with the butter, tucking some of it up under the breast skin.

Roast undisturbed for half an hour. Reduce the temperature to 375 degrees; lay the lemon slices on the chicken breast and continue roasting, occasionally basting with the pan juices, until the thigh juices run clear when poked and a digital thermometer registers 165 degrees when inserted into the thickest part of the thigh. Allow the chicken to rest for about 15 minutes before serving with the potatoes and plenty of pan juices.

Beth Dooley is the author of "The Perennial Kitchen." Find her at bethdooleyskitchen.com.

GRETCHEN'S TABLE

Chicken meatballs in mushroom sauce are a savory pair

By GRETCHEN MCKAY
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

As an agricultural state, Pennsylvania is known for the many fresh fruits and vegetables that grace our dinner tables each night.

Farming pumps about $132.5 billion into the state economy each year, supporting nearly 600,000 jobs across the commonwealth, according to the Department of Agriculture, which recently hosted its annual extravaganza of all things farming – the 110th Pennsylvania Farm Show in Harrisburg.

One cash crop that might run under the radar is grown not under the sun but indoors, providing consistent, year-round harvests: mushrooms.

Pennsylvania accounts for 60-70 percent of mushroom production in the U.S. A majority are grown in the eastern half of the state in Kennett Square, which calls itself the Mushroom Capital of the World. All told, farms across the state bring in $1.3 billion annually and provide more than 9,300 jobs, according to a sign displayed at the farm show.

Not everyone is a fungi fan, of course. For some, it's a textural thing (mushrooms can be slimy or rubbery) while others simply don't like their earthy flavor (or smell!) or the fact they're grown on decaying matter.

But here's a few reasons you might want to partake.

Rich in antioxidants, B vitamins and fiber, mushrooms are also low in calories, salt and fat, so they have a positive impact on heart health. Whole or sliced, brown, white or specialty, they also are an all-purpose ingredient, used not just in lunch and dinner (soups, stews, stir-fries, casseroles) but also breakfast (omelets and on toast). You can even turn them into snacks or hors d'oeuvres.

This recipe shows the humble white button mushroom's versatility in a savory sauce thickened with heavy cream and flavored with garlic and shallots and tossed with chicken meatballs.

The entire dish comes together in about a half hour, not counting the 10 minutes the meatballs chill in the fridge, and can be served with whatever carb your family likes best – noodles, rice or even mashed potatoes. They're also tasty on their own, without any supporting players. (Just make them small and use a toothpick.)

When buying, look for mushrooms that are firm and consistent in coloring. Unless they're dried, bulk mushrooms should be used within just a few days of purchasing, stored in a brown paper bag.

If you can't bear the thought of not washing them (some are packaged clean), quickly rinse them with cold water and use a salad spinner or cloth to dry them quickly. Or, wipe them with a damp paper towel.

I fried the meatballs in olive oil, but you also could roast them in a hot oven to cut down on fat and calories.

Gretchen McKay / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette / TNS

Meatballs made with ground chicken are a little lighter than those made with beef.

Chicken Meatballs in Mushroom Sauce

Serves 4-6

I used ground white meat chicken and white button mushrooms. If the mushrooms are not packaged clean, be sure to remove any dirt with a damp paper towel.

To cut down on fat, bake the meatballs in a 375-degree oven for about 20 minutes instead of frying them.

I love the taste of fresh rosemary, but some people don't like it. If you're not a fan, simply leave it out of the sauce.

FOR MEATBALLS:
1 pound ground chicken
1/2 cup panko or regular breadcrumbs
1/3 cup whole milk
1 large egg, beaten
1/3 cup grated Parmesan
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon onion powder
1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon kosher salt
Extra-virgin olive oil, for frying

FOR SAUCE:
2 tablespoons butter
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 large shallot, peeled and chopped (about 1/4 cup)
1 cup mushrooms, finely chopped
2 tablespoons flour or cornstarch
1 1/2 cups chicken broth or stock
1 teaspoon chopped fresh rosemary
1 teaspoon chopped fresh parsley
Pinch of smoked paprika
Salt and pepper, to taste
1/2 cup heavy or light cream

Make meatballs: In large bowl, stir together ground chicken, breadcrumbs, milk, beaten egg, Parmesan cheese, parsley, olive oil, spices and salt. Mix with your hands or a rubber spatula until well combined.

Using a spoon or small ice cream scoop, roll into 24 meatballs. Place on a baking sheet, place in refrigerator and allow meatballs to chill for 20 minutes to help them firm up.

When ready to cook, heat 1/4 inch of olive oil in a large saute pan over medium-high heat. Place meatballs in the hot oil in a single layer; don't overcrowd the pan. You may need to cook in batches.

Cook for about 3-5 minutes per side, turning them regularly to get an even brown crust on all sides.

Remove to a paper towel-lined plate to drain and set aside while you make the sauce.

Heat 2 tablespoons butter and 1 tablespoon olive oil in the same pan. When sizzling, add minced garlic and chopped shallot. Cook until the shallots soften and turn translucent. Add chopped mushrooms and cook for another 4-5 minutes.

Whisk in flour or cornstarch and cook for 1 more minute to get rid of the raw flour flavor. Slowly add chicken broth or stock, whisking continuously until the sauce thickens.

Stir in rosemary, parsley and a pinch of paprika, then season to taste with salt and pepper. Gently fold in meatballs. If the sauce is too thick, add a little more stock or water.

Simmer meatballs for 10 minutes, gently stirring every so often. Stir in heavy cream, toss to make sure it's well combined and turn off the heat.

Serve hot on top of noodles, rice or mashed potatoes.

Gretchen McKay, Post-Gazette

ENTERTAINMENT

SERIES REVIEW

Balancing the scales of justice

Charlie Cox as Matt Murdock/ Daredevil in Season 2 of "Daredevil: Born Again."

JoJo Whilden / Marvel / Disney / TNS

'Daredevil: Born Again' Season 2 is high-energy from first episode

By DOMINIC BAEZ
The Seattle Times (TNS)

Last year's excellent "Daredevil: Born Again" took its time establishing the stakes. Through its slow-burn pacing, the first season of the Disney+ series served as a reintroduction to characters and storylines we hadn't seen since the Marvel Television series was on (and then canceled by) Netflix in the mid-2010s. It was, in a word, the setup. There's nothing slow about Season 2, though, which begins to capitalize on that setup by diving in fists first. From its beat-'em-up opener to its chaotic finale, this new season amps up … well, everything, to greatly entertaining effect.

Season 2, the first episode of which premiered Tuesday on Disney+, continues shortly after the events of the first season: New York City is in a state of emergency, thanks to Mayor Wilson Fisk/Kingpin (Vincent D'Onofrio) and his Safer Streets Initiative, which bans vigilantism. Enforcing his edict is his own private, taxpayer-funded militia, the Anti-Vigilante Task Force, which has been given carte blanche to make the city "safer." If that means sadistically spitting in the face of constitutional liberties and protections to terrorize and disappear anyone who gets in their way – the immigrant restaurateur, the overworked defense lawyer, a fellow law enforcement officer – so be it. It's for the good of the city, obviously. (The parallels to the Trump administration and its use of Immigration and Customs Enforcement aren't exactly subtle.)

Meanwhile, Matt Murdock/Daredevil (Charlie Cox) and Karen Page (Deborah Ann Woll) are in hiding, trying to take down Wilson from the shadows. Karen is taking a cloak-and-dagger approach, finding and sharing evidence that Wilson is up to his old criminal ways, while Matt is rocking a new Daredevil suit (finally with the "DD" logo!) and generally being a thorn in the task force's side. Their goal: to create a resistance movement against the mayor, and break his autocratic rule over the city by showing everyone just who he really is (which, you know, is a crime overlord).

Whereas the first season was defined by suffocating guilt born of loss and regret, the second season is more about penance, of seeking redemption and second chances. It leans into the philosophical – What is a vigilante? What is a hero? – and the religious. (Matt's Catholicism plays a much heavier role this season.) It asks questions that don't have easy answers: Who deserves forgiveness, and who can grant it? Who gets to make the call between life or death, and when does it cross the line from justice to vengeance? It also wonders – best shown in a clever sequence of interwoven flashbacks in a midseason episode – if people are capable of change, or if the past is the only thing that defines us.

But it's not all weighty discussions of morality and philosophy; the action packs just as much of a punch this season. It only takes a few minutes into the first episode before Daredevil is throwing bodies around in viscerally kinetic fisticuffs. The fight choreography remains stellar, particularly when two secondary characters – superhero Jessica Jones (Krysten Ritter, who reprises her role from the "Jessica Jones" series) and assassin Bullseye (a standout Wilson Bethel) – are teaming up or duking it out with Daredevil. A particular gem: a prison break-style sequence that's so well done it rivals the famed one-shot hallway fight scene from the first season of the original series. (This season also seems to remember that Matt has supernatural hearing, a skill he honed after becoming blind in his youth and one that saves him more than once this time around.)

Speaking of standouts, Cox and D'Onofrio again nail their performances. D'Onofrio this season brings an enormous range of emotion to Wilson, who's generally known for stoicism or rage. Watching him watch his world fall apart is a pure delight. And Cox brings his trademark witty charm and rueful grin, adding depth and nuance to the superhero. (And kudos to Matthew Lillard's gleefully unhinged Mr. Charles, a mysterious CIA operative who seems to be playing a much bigger game than Wilson.)

What didn't stand out (or did, depending on how you look at it) is the lighting. Lens flares are everywhere, and more than a few scenes were so blindingly backlit that it was difficult to tell what was happening on screen. Thankfully that tended to happen during slower moments, so none of the action was missed, but it was distracting all the same.

Suffice to say, all that Season 1 setup has paid off quite nicely in Season 2. Across eight tightly paced episodes full of narrative momentum, we watch as Matt and his friends try to balance the scales of justice, no matter how futile it may seem. (It's apt that Matt finds himself praying to St. Jude, the patron saint of lost causes and desperate situations.) It's classic David versus Goliath, and there's something powerful in Matt's act of resistance, of saying no when everyone else says yes, of standing up to injustice even when it's unpopular – maybe especially then. It's an important message, one we should remember, even if the deliverer is wearing a devil suit.

'Daredevil: Born Again' Season 2

Rating: TV-MA

How to watch: Disney+

MOVIE REVIEW

'They Will Kill You' a bonkers horror comedy

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

One's tolerance for hyperviolent giggle-fests might vary depending on which way the wind blows, but if you only have time for one movie in theaters about a cult of elite satanists hunting down a pair of sisters, you might as well make it Kirill Sokolov's cheerfully gonzo "Kill Bill" riff "They Will Kill You," starring Zazie Beetz.

It's of course purely coincidental that two films with such similar premises – "Ready or Not 2: Here I Come" and "They Will Kill You" – are in theaters at the same time, but secret elitist cults with a taste for young women have been on the brain for years now. In Sokolov's "They Will Kill You," written with Alex Litvak, that premise is combined with a Tarantino-esque taste for kung fu movies and nonlinear storytelling, as well as a "John Wick"-style quest for vengeance.

That may sound too derivative for some, but Sokolov, known for his outlandish Russian-language action comedies "Why Don't You Just Die!" and "No Looking Back," brings a truly wacky sensibility to his first English-language feature. It's also a visual feast, with a dynamic camera interacting with fight choreography that is truly its own beast. Cinematographer Isaac Bauman's camera never stops moving, as an independent narrator telling a different story than the one starring our heroine.

Beetz stars as Asia, a young woman who turns up on the stoop of a high-end Manhattan apartment building, the Virgil, answering an ad for a maid job. But both she and the stern house manager, Lily (Patricia Arquette) are hiding something from each other. Asia hasn't been brought in as a servant, but as an offering, a human sacrifice, to be hunted by the wealthy residents of the Virgil, and Asia hasn't made her way there to work, but to find and rescue her younger sister, Maria (Myha'la).

Their backstory is fleshed out in flashbacks, but all you need to know is that Asia, who honed her combat skills in prison, has one goal that is diametrically opposed to the goal of the bloodthirsty rich folks in cloaks and pig masks, and they'll have to fight it out until dawn.

"They Will Kill You" is both irreverent, and reverential to its references, and cartoonishly violent in increasingly surreal ways, but it also maintains the emotional core at the center, which is Asia's blind big sister protectiveness over Maria, powered by the guilt she feels over not being there for her. It's a simple, but primal character motivation that Beetz sells with a wild-eyed ferocity.

Beetz delivers a terrifically animated physical performance. Her fight training is top-notch, but the way she chaotically scrambles and swings her weapons – from samurai swords to sawed-off shotguns to flaming axes – gives her quality of movement a sense of authentic panic and sheer reflexes. She and the rest of the cast, which includes Tom Felton and Heather Graham, engage in a delightful dance with the camera in each fight scene, as it hits the ground, chases them down and shakes the foundations of the building.

While Sokolov and Litvak's script is thematically simplified, it incorporates a few nods to racial and class solidarity throughout that are refreshing to see addressed, even if some of the nuances go unexamined. But Sokolov and Litvak leave these few real-world thematic threads dangling as they have bigger fish to fry – or pigs to roast.

It's the more bonkers elements that make this movie sing anyway, and that grinning, ghoulish sensibility proves to be Sokolov's auteurist signature. It's clear that he takes inspiration from some of the best genre films and filmmakers of the 20th century, from kung fu, to Westerns, to exploitation films, and has filtered it through the ironically postmodern lens of the '90s bad boy movie nerd directors. But his willingness to get really weird with it – paired with a terrific sense of visual storytelling – makes him one to watch, and makes "They Will Kill You" more entertaining than it initially seems.

'They Will Kill You'

★★ ½

MPA rating: R (for strong bloody violence, gore, language and brief sexual content/ nudity)

Running time: 1:34

How to watch: In theaters March 27

Warner Bros. Pictures / TNS

Zazie Beetz stars in "They Will Kill You."

FOUR SIXES
GRIT & GLORY
Paramount NETWORK
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NFR

Amanda McCoy / Fort Worth Star-Telegram / TNS

"Yellowstone" show creator Taylor Sheridan signs autographs for fans at the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo on Feb. 3, 2023.

How Taylor Sheridan became *the TV king of North Texas*

By UWA EDE-OSIFO
The Dallas Morning News (TNS)

DALLAS — If you live in North Texas, you may have recently stumbled across a peculiar road closure. Perhaps you saw a clue in the form of a sign that read "SET." The commotion most likely traced back to Taylor Sheridan, the Fort Worth-raised show creator who has churned out TV hits at a dizzying pace.

At a time when filming in Los Angeles is at a low, according to The Hollywood Reporter, Sheridan is propelling North Texas to become a force for film and TV in a way that it perhaps never has before. It's a development that coincides with the state's recent largest investment in film incentives funding – an effort that Sheridan lobbied for and for which he is now reaping the rewards.

Sheridan has forged a TV empire by channeling the rugged mythology of the Western frontier into ratings juggernaut "Yellowstone," which spawned several spinoffs. He has maintained the momentum with a slew of unrelated dramas. Last fall alone, three shows he wrote – " Landman," "Tulsa King" and "Mayor of Kingstown" – streamed new episodes on Paramount+.

Sheridan's ascent has been well-chronicled, but less known is the integral role North Texas has played as a filming backdrop.

Over the last year or so, the visibility of Sheridan's productions in the region has skyrocketed. One day, his espionage thriller "Lioness" could be shooting a racy scene in Dallas with scantily clad cocktail servers; another day, extras could be attending a high-end party shoot in Ferris alongside veteran actress Annette Bening, who stars in " Dutton Ranch," a "Yellowstone" spinoff set to premiere in May. A spinoff of crime drama "Tulsa King" was expected to film in New Orleans before recently changing its fictional setting to Frisco. The show is now called "Frisco King" and is filming in the D-FW.

The Dallas Morning News contacted Sheridan's publicist for an interview, but Sheridan was on vacation and unable to be reached. Sheridan told The Hollywood Reporter in 2023 he ramped up his TV output to help pay for his sprawling Four Sixes ranch in Guthrie, about four hours northwest of Dallas.

For whatever personal reasons fuel him, Sheridan has benefited from seemingly uninhibited access to the area's urban cores and rural outskirts – which serve not just as film sites, but in some instances as plot devices. Area officials are emphatic about the boon from Sheridan's work, saying the region has profited from the creation of jobs and economic activity. The fanfare around Sheridan's star-studded productions has also fueled hopes of tourism.

Land and logistics

In 2021, the Fort Worth City Council approved road closures in the Stockyards so the "Yellowstone" prequel "1883" could film for two weeks. To match the 19th-century setting of the show, streetlights were removed and roads covered with dirt. A hamburger joint, Hooker's Grill, closed and its outdoor deck was transformed into a rustic saloon.

The Fort Worth Film Commission, which celebrated its 10th anniversary last year, had laid the logistical groundwork for approving film permits and executing road closures, according to former commissioner Jessica Hill.

Elías Valverde II / Dallas Morning News / TNS

Actor Billy Bob Thornton walks with production crew members while filming season two of the Paramount+ series "Landman" outside Mister Charles on Knox Street on July 21 in Dallas.

Previous projects included Irving-raised David Lowery's 2018 movie "The Old Man & the Gun " and Ty Roberts' 2021 movie "12 Mighty Orphans."

Still, the scale of "1883's" Stockyards revamp was unprecedented. The moment would telegraph the future ubiquity of Sheridan's productions in North Texas.

Hill credited Fort Worth's willingness to green light the Stockyards takeover to the potential economic opportunities for businesses and hotels. "I can't really think of an instance where we got a hard no from anyone," she said of Sheridan's growing presence."It was more like, 'Let's figure this out.'"

Some Fort Worth residents have grumbled about the inconvenience of street closures, but local businesses don't seem to be complaining.

61 Osteria, an Italian restaurant in downtown Fort Worth, has been featured in "Lioness" and Sheridan's oil drama, "Landman." The restaurant team was initially "standoffish" when approached for "Lioness," according to executive chef Blaine Staniford. They were hesitant about having to close and potentially cancel reservations.

But Staniford said he was impressed by the TV crew's professionalism. Plus, the restaurant was paid for closures, he said: "They cover what your estimated sales would be." Recently, Staniford said, Sheridan has placed large to-go orders for crew and filming staff. "It could be easily a couple grand or more, which is a huge burst for us before we've even opened our door."

Stephen Reich, a broker for the Fort Worth real estate firm Williams Trew, made a brief cameo in the latest season of "Landman," showing Ali Larter 's character a property. The Sunday the episode dropped, he said, he received "without exaggeration" more than 300 phone calls and texts, many from previous clients wanting to work with him again. Sheridan "really plugged the whole company," Reich said, noting the appearance has lent it further credibility.

With their huge audience, Sheridan's shows have elevated Dallas' national visibility, according to Katie Schuck, the city's film commissioner. The city's landscape has doubled as Baltimore and New York in shoots for "Lioness" and "The Madison," respectively.

The shows have generated significant economic activity, according to Schuck. "Having his work based in D-FW means consistent investment in our local crew base, small businesses, public services, and the broader film ecosystem," she said via email.

Farther north, Frisco has become the latest entry to the Sheridan universe.

Some people might have wondered why the city was chosen as the setting for Sheridan's "Tulsa King" spinoff when that news broke, Frisco Mayor Jeff Cheney said.

"There's a lot of people outside of Texas that still have a certain perception – you know that we're all on horses and cowboy hats and the tumbleweeds going across the highway," he said, adding that Frisco is "a modern, urban city."

Frisco is home to the headquarters of the Dallas Cowboys and the Professional Golfers' Association of America. Country stars descended on the city for the last three Academy of Country Music Awards.

The infrastructure used to accommodate the high-profile sports and entertainment events will come in handy for "Frisco King," according to Cheney. He said the show will shoot one or two days of B-roll in Frisco for each of its eight episodes.

The show, which does not yet have a release date, stars Samuel L. Jackson as Lee, a New Orleans-raised hit man. Cheney has described it as a "fish out of water" comedy and said Frisco will be portrayed as a modern Mayberry, the idyllic town in "The Andy Griffith Show." It's unclear why Lee is headed there, but Cheney said the character will be shocked by his shiny new community.

A more profitable filming environment

Just as North Texas cities have helped Sheridan scale his TV ambition, the state's recent expansion of its film subsidies program has secured his future here.

In 2023, as Sheridan sought to move his operation to Texas, he arranged for a dinner with Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, according to Patrick spokesperson Steven Aranyi.

Sheridan and Patrick posed for a photograph in the Texas Senate afterward that was posted to the lieutenant governor's Facebook page. "He's a Texan and gets Texas," Patrick wrote of the meeting. "My goal is for Taylor to move all of his TV and movie production to Texas. Working together, I think we can get it done."

Aranyi said via email that Patrick was attracted to the "promise of thousands of high-paying Texas jobs for all the behind-the-scenes crew, and the sales tax revenues it would bring to rural communities and big cities for on-location productions."

Later that year, Texas would boost its film incentives to a then-record $200 million.

Two years later, in 2025, Patrick would up the ante, naming as a legislative priority a bill that proposed more funding for film incentives. Senate Bill 22, he suggested, would make Texas "America's film capital." It was signed into law by Gov. Greg Abbott later that year, establishing a $300 million biennial fund for state incentives to be allocated until 2035.

The massive investment was a far cry from past years, when funding was inconsistent. Sheridan cited the shaky record as an impediment to him filming in Texas when he advocated for incentives funding before legislators in October 2024.

"One of my great frustrations is that I wrote a movie called 'Hell or High Water,' which was really my love poem to my state," Sheridan said, "and they filmed the darn thing in New Mexico. They could not ignore the 30 percent rebate that New Mexico offered."

His lobbying has paid off.

According to records obtained by The Dallas Morning News, four Sheridan shows approved for film incentives in the 2024-25 fiscal year – "Lioness," "1923," "The Madison" and "Landman" – were expected to receive at least $67 million in cash rebates based on projected in-state spending of over $269 million.

"Tax rebates are really important to a show and to its profitability," said David Glasser, CEO of 101 Studios, a production company that collaborates with Sheridan. The support of state and local brass plus the competitive subsidies, Glasser said, made the decision easier to continue filming in Texas.

The million-dollar question is if others can replicate Sheridan's success.

Alisa Perren, a professor at the University of Texas at Austin who has studied media incentives, is unsure if that will happen. Sheridan built his TV empire from a strong foundation as the creator of "Yellowstone" and indie Western films. He had name recognition that others might not have.

Other states, meanwhile, are wooing productions with more competitive rebates and fewer strings attached, Perren said. Grant applications in Texas may be denied for "inappropriate content" or work that portrays the state in a "negative fashion."

Sheridan's productions, it seems, have not been held back by such issues. With his multiseason shows, he may remain an outsize presence in North Texas for years to come, especially now that he has planted firmer roots here by opening a production hub in Fort Worth.

In a news release announcing that hub last year, Sheridan said "Texas offers something rare: the space to dream big, the freedom to build fast, and a community that still believes storytelling matters."

Q&A

‘Scrubs’ star Judy Reyes is milking Hollywood for all it’s worth

By ANDREA FLORES
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

LOS ANGELES — Judy Reyes is making every moment count.

Earlier this year, the Bronx-born Dominican actor reprised her breakthrough TV role as Carla Espinosa on the reboot of the beloved ABC medical sitcom, “Scrubs.” For just four episodes, she returned to Sacred Heart Hospital as head nurse and an exhausted mother of four daughters, whom she parents alongside her onscreen hubby, chief of surgery Dr. Christopher Turk (played by Donald Faison).

While fans only caught a quick glimpse of Carla – who is said to be picking up extra shifts elsewhere – her name lingers in the script.

“I’m like the Lord,” said Reyes on a recent video call with The Times. “Just when you think you’re getting away with something, there’s Carla!”

In reality, Reyes has been splitting her time on set with another ABC workplace drama. Now in its second season, “High Potential” sees Reyes leading a top-notch team of crime solvers as Lieutenant Selena Soto, opposite Kaitlin Olson and Daniel Sunjata. “I don’t know any other way to be!” she said of the role. “Latinos are lieutenants and nurses and doctors, et cetera!”

When The Times connected with Reyes, she was crouched down backstage at the Lovinger Theatre at Lehman College in the Bronx. We spoke merely hours before the debut of “Freestyle: A Love Story,” a stage production that follows two lovers who meet at a freestyle show – then reconnect at a concert 20 years later.

Created and directed by George Valencia, with Reyes as one of the executive producers, the story interlaces the history of freestyle music: a Latin hip-hop and pop hybrid genre popularized in the 1980s by acts like Lisa Lisa & Cult Jam, George Lamond and Judy Torres.

“Our very existence is political no matter what. Our joy is a problem for a lot of people,” said Reyes. “It’s really important for us to tell our stories.”

Between the passion project and two highly-rated Hulu shows, which continue to stream on the platform despite eventual plans to merge into the Disney+ app, Reyes is not taking her spotlight for granted – especially amid a sinking Hollywood industry model that’s made it difficult for some to find work – “I’m milking it for all it’s about,” she said.

[This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.]

Q: How were you able to film both the “Scrubs” reboot and Season 2 of “High Potential”?

A: ABC was willing to make it work. “Scrubs” had been in the works for a long time. From Zach Braff and Donald Faison doing their podcast [during the pandemic], to the T-Mobile commercials ... A whole new generation became interested in and got hitched to “Scrubs.”] It just so happened at the same time that “High Potential” was happening. My manager was wonderful about making sure [filming] was accommodating.

Did it feel natural to return as your character Carla on “Scrubs”?

It did. They did right by making all these characters older. We were all older with each other. We’re all friends that don’t necessarily talk to each other every day [except] Zach and Donald – they’re pretty much married – but it was like we never left.

What has changed in Carla – and what hasn’t changed?

What’s changed in Carla is that she’s got four kids and she’s tired and she’s older. The consuming passion of her work is not what it used to be because it’s physical. Life is catching up. Her kids are older, so everything changes and she’s not able to work her ass off the way she used to and she has to confront that.

In season 2 of “High Potential,” your character Lieutenant Soto faces a moment of defeat when she’s not chosen to be captain. What thoughts popped into your head as you rehearsed the scene?

It’s extremely well-written. Defeat is very relatable as a woman – [and] as a woman of color, as a woman of a certain age and as a woman of a certain position. I think we can all, as actors, relate to not getting something you are sure you deserved. But there’s also the surrendering. It’s opening up to all the [possibilities] because if you don’t do that, then you get paralyzed. It stops you in your tracks. “Well, what if I feel this defeat again?” You might, you know, but what’s your alternative?You gotta eat s— to move ahead.

There are some moments in “High Potential” when your character is holding up a mug with the Dominican Republic flag. How do you find other ways to incorporate your Latinidad in the story?

When we did the “High Potential” pilot, the props department said I got a mug in the scene and if I wanted anything on it. I was like, “Hmm, no one ever asked me before. Can you do a Dominican flag?” That was in Vancouver and I’ve had it since. The Dominicans lose their f— minds on social media and I love it. It fills my heart.

The other stuff is just being me, which is the purpose of being an artist. I don’t know how much sense it makes to throw in the Spanish word, unless you have other Latino people with you.

Latinos haven’t historically been represented as leaders in Hollywood. Has it evolved?

Things progressed before DEI collapsed. There was an active attempt and pursuit of putting people of color in leadership roles. I’m grateful it’s happened. I’m sad it’s retreated a little bit, but I think it has to start behind the camera. We need to champion writers, directors, producers and the stories or get risky and daring with casting.

What has changed in Hollywood and what has not changed in your perspective?

Many things have changed from the way we view television. Everything is streamed. Now everything is a limited series. There’s such a political impact in what gets seen and what doesn’t. It’s very hard for people right now and I feel challenged to say how it is better, because I’m working. I see how hard it is. The best thing I can do is seize the platform and connect with other creatives who want to go ahead and take a chance and make investments in stories.

Now with the growing monopolies in the entertainment industry, I’m sure that’ll likely change Hollywood too.

It continues to affect the workforce. The workforce is gonna be severely impacted. The more you merge, the more people you fire and the more machines you put in their place. It’s a frightening moment.

I’m grateful I saw Noah Wyle represent against the [Paramount-Warner Bros.] merger. I’m motivated, because I think we ultimately have to protect each other and protect the art for as long as we can.

What grounds you and your art in an era that is often trying to strip you away from your creative liberties?

My company GoodTalk Films, myself and my partner and husband George Valencia are working with the Watford F.C. Women’s League to launch a Latina Women’s Football Club here in L.A.. We [want to] train Latinas to be coaches. That’s another way to reach out to the community and help people see themselves. That keeps you grounded in the creative process.

I see a lot of theater. I make a lot of trips to New York. I just saw [the Broadway adaptation of] “Dog Day Afternoon,” produced by Stephen Adly Guirgis. My kid is in the arts and I hang out a lot with him and help him sing and perform.The process is what brings joy in working with other people interested in the same thing.

Monica Schipper / Getty Images / TNS
Judy Reyes attends the premiere of ABC/Hulu’s “Scrubs” at Academy Museum of Motion Pictures on Feb. 23 in Los Angeles.

REVIEW

A new PBS documentary reveals why Henry David Thoreau’s radicalism resonates today

By ROBERT LLOYD
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

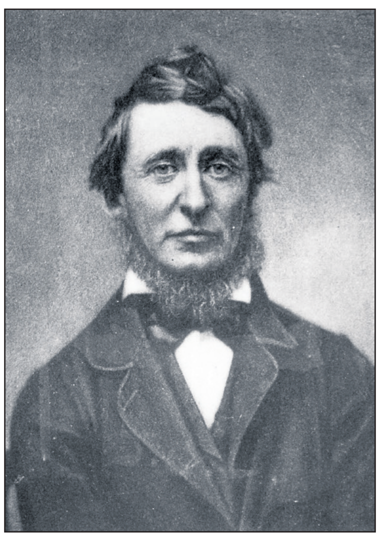
Henry David Thoreau is one of those figures whose name one may know but whose writing often boils down in the mind to titles of works never read – including “Walden” and “Civil Disobedience.” Some lines may be familiar: “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation”; “Our life is frittered away by detail ... simplify, simplify!” (The latter I first heard quoted by a character played by Dick Van Dyke in the movie “What a Way to Go!”) Thoreau coined the phrase “different drummer,” which links him directly to Mike Nesmith of the Monkees, whose song “Different Drum” became a hit for Linda Ronstadt and the Stone Poneys in 1967.

At the same time, since Thoreau’s death in 1862 at age 44, his writing has traveled far, wide and long, influencing many who did happen to read it, including Malcolm X, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. His thoughts on how to live in the world remain inspiring, even as his observations on man’s inhumanity to man and nature have been, unfortunately and increasingly, relevant in the nearly two centuries since his works were published.

“The winds and the waves are not enough for him; he must needs ransack the bowels of the earth that he may make for himself a highway of iron over its surface” is as true as it ever was. An observation like, “Fools stand on their island of opportunities and look toward another land. There is no other land; there is no other life but this,” could easily apply to those who quixotically believe the remedy for a trashed Earth is to live on Mars. “A government which deliberately enacts injustice and persists in it will at length ever become the laughingstock of the world … I say break the law; let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine,” foreshadows our current state of federal domestic terrorism and grassroots resistance. “Who can be serene in a country where both the rulers and the ruled are without principle?” he asked. “My thoughts are murder to the State, and involuntarily go plotting against her.” Been there.

“Ultimately his life would be reduced to legend and his complex prose to one-liners,” says narrator George Clooney at the start of “Henry David Thoreau,” a new documentary from PBS that’s now available to stream, that aims to highlight the prose, fill in the biographical blanks and bring the legend back to earth – picturing the warts while still celebrating him as a great American writer, thinker, naturalist and weirdo. Directed by brothers Erik and Christopher Loren Ewers and written by David Blistein, it has as executive producers America’s chronicler Ken Burns and Don Henley from the Eagles, who in 1990 founded the preservationist Walden Woods Project. Jeff Goldblum (in a David Strathairn mood) speaks Thoreau’s words, while Ted Danson, Meryl Streep and Tate Donovan supply other voices.

Three hours might seem a stretch for this subject, but with the Walden period bookended by the lesser known pre- and post-Walden years, it stays interesting all along. Suggesting the scope of Thoreau’s interests and effects, the commentators include, along a host of “literary scholars,” a religious studies scholar, a geologist, an environmental activist, a Penobscot historian and, identified simply as “writer,” the well-known Michael Pollan, Rebecca Solnit and Pico Iyer.


Hulton Archive / Getty Images / TNS
The life of Henry David Thoreau is examined in a new PBS documentary.

Thoreau had the good luck to be born in Concord, Mass. – the very center of transcendentalism, a spiritual cum philosophical cum literary movement that saw divinity in everything – with Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose protege, handyman and lodger he would become; Nathaniel Hawthorne; and Bronson and Louisa May Alcott for neighbors. His mother, who introduced him at age 5 to Walden Pond, was an abolitionist who ran a station on the Underground Railroad, for which he would act as a conductor.

In 1845, age 27, he built himself a 10-by-15-foot cabin by the pond, on land owned by Emerson, where he would live for two years, two months and two days. “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately,” he famously wrote, “to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” He might spend a whole day in his doorway thinking, but much of the time spent at the cabin was taken up by committing thoughts to paper, or more scientifically recording his observations of the natural world.

But he was no hermit. People dropped by. He walked regularly up to Concord to sell vegetables he grew or hear the local gossip (which, “when taken in homeopathic doses was really as refreshing as the rustle of leaves”), see the family, drop off his laundry, do some chores. It was on one of these trips that he ran into the town constable, who asked him to pay six years of back poll taxes, which Thoreau had withheld in protest of the federal government’s condoning slavery; Thoreau refused and spent the night in jail – someone did pay the tax, to his displeasure – which became the stuff of “Civil Disobedience.”

His experiment in self-realization put him in a long line of spiritual seekers, and like innumerable young persons in every generation, he was actively engaged in evolving a design for living, drawing from sources near to and farther from home. (Thoreau scholar Lawrence Buell calls Transcendentalism “the first youth movement in American history.”) “In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonal philosophy of the Bhagavad-gita,” Thoreau writes in “Walden,” and imagines that via the global ice trade “the pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges.”

Apart from the Walden adventure, Thoreau appeared as a public speaker and worked as a surveyor and in his father’s very successful pencil factory, for which he created some important innovations. With his older brother John, he ran a school, having left a previous teaching post from a disinclination to administer corporal punishment. He traveled around New England and wrote about it, looking for nature at its most untamed, but sometimes finding mills and factories and a river dammed. (The Industrial Revolution was in full swing.) He had fanciful notions about Native Americans until he got to know some as people.

Whatever else he was, he was a writer first, and “Henry David Thoreau” shows you the words, photographing them on a typeset page or in Thoreau’s own hand (his journaling ran to more than 2 million words), putting passages onscreen. Because there are few actual images of Thoreau or his kin, we see the same ones over and over again; the documentary is illustrated with archival photos and artworks, not all exactly from the period or illustrating the event discussed – but good to look at. The directors take a visual essay approach, contrasting Walden Pond and its woods and the rivers Thoreau rowed with sped-up footage of our crazy modern world – which can be a little on the nose. Well, you work with what you’ve got.

And the shots of nature are very pretty indeed – the documentary might inspire you, once you’re done watching, or even sooner, to get off the couch and go into the world.

BOOKS

New graphic novel tells tale of Chicago Public Schools' 2013 attempted book ban

By CHRISTOPHER BORRELLI
Chicago Tribune (TNS)

ABOVE: Librarian and author Jarrett Dapier sits for a conversation with Chicago Teachers Union project organizer and former teacher Nora Flanagan about his graphic novel, "Wake Now in the Fire," at The Book Cellar on Feb. 3 in Chicago. **RIGHT:** Dapier's graphic novel, "Wake Now in the Fire," is on display at the register.

Photos by John J. Kim / Chicago Tribune / TNS

CHICAGO — Thirteen years ago, at Lane Tech College Prep High School on Addison Street, a school administrator approached an English teacher and told her that he needed all of her copies of "Persepolis," the widely beloved, best-selling 2000 graphic novel from Marjane Satrapi about her childhood under the oppressive regime in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. The teacher didn't understand the demand at first: Wait, are you confiscating "Persepolis"?

The administrator made it clearer: He needed EVERY copy, now.

Turns out, as often happens with a case of book banning, a single person had a problem with a single page in a book – in this case, a drawing of the torture of political prisoners. Students caught wind of the confiscation and quickly rallied a sizable protest outside the school. Barbara Byrd-Bennett, head of CPS at the time (later jailed on bribery charges), claimed she had nothing to do with the removal. Alas, here was an extremely rare instance of a book banning in Chicago.

It made headlines for a few days. Chicago Public Schools swore it was a case of miscommunication. With a handful of exceptions, mainly for younger students, "Persepolis" was soon returned to CPS classrooms.

The world moved on.

Except Jarrett Dapier.

He still remembers where he was when he heard about the ban: "I was a librarian at Evanston Public Library, working on the teen desk. When the news of the ban started filtering through Twitter, I was working alone that night and I found myself waving my arms in anger, all hysterical and alone. I was totally outraged, but also pretty pumped that these teens were protesting right away and wouldn't let it slide."

Thirteen years later, as a way of honoring those students, while also laying out exactly how the banning incident happened and why it "foreshadows our current moment," Dapier turned the Lane Tech controversy into "Wake Now in the Fire: A Story of Censorship, Action, Love and Hope," a sweeping 463-page graphic novel with art by A.J. Dungo. The book's primary characters are fictional, but many names (CPS, Bennett) are not, and the narrative itself weaves in actual texts and emails that flew between real participants. The book is also partly an adaption of a thesis paper that Dapier wrote a decade ago as a graduate student of library sciences at University of Illinois. He interviewed teachers, principals, librarians, many students involved in the protests. A year after the banning, he was still discovering fresh insights – a case of persistence that later led to an intellectual freedom award from the American Library Association.

Before a recent book-launch party for "Wake Now" at the Book Cellar in Lincoln Square, down the street from Lane Tech, he met with Nora Flanagan, one of the librarians at the center of the banning. In fact, the copies of "Persepolis" pulled from that initial classroom were put there years earlier by Flanagan herself, who bought them with her own money when she taught at Lane Tech. At the time of the ban, she was at Northside College Prep on Kedzie Avenue in the North Park neighborhood.

They curled into chairs in a corner of the store, watching a crowd filter in.

"A year after the ban, I was in a graduate class and I was looking at how censorship affects teen reading. I remember how dissatisfied I still felt about the outcome," Dapier said. "Within a week of the protests, CPS had managed to just sweep it under the rug."

"They walked it back so hard they fell into traffic," Flanagan said.

Across her knuckles were tattooed letters spelling: "READ MORE."

As they chatted, the room filled with ghosts of 2013, former students and school librarians and writers who remembered the chill set off by the banning inside the Chicago literary community. There was Levi Todd, who founded a Lane Tech club for readers of banned books; he graduated years ago. And there was Beth Hetland, cartoonist and teacher at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; she was out of high school by 2013, but had marched alongside the students. Dapier himself met Flanagan around that time because of the ban, when he started reaching out to students and teachers who were involved. "I remember the teacher who had my copies of 'Persepolis,' 25 or 30, texted me right away," Flanagan said. "She feared for her job."

"In my book, when the (teacher) says, 'These are personal copies, you can't have them,' and the (principal) is 'Uh … you can't … wait …,' he's following orders," Dapier said.

"He's trying to impress a boss, who is trying to impress their boss," Flanagan said, "because that's what happens when a big-city school system becomes a business. But really what Jarrett found here, after he FOIA'd the school, was basically incompetence."

About a year after the ban, Dapier submitted a Freedom of Information Act request to CPS, asking for any communications about the "Persepolis" incident. When the ALA made its own FOIA request, it got back scant details, mainly redacted. "So when I sent my FOIA, I didn't expect much," he said. "I got back 42 pages of emails. My son was a baby and he was sitting in his highchair, so I'm watching him and flipping through pages on my phone, which are almost entirely redacted, but I also notice every time I flip a page, the redactions are gone for like a split second. So I'm like 'Wait a second …' I opened a review app and was able to highlight the black highlighter, and then, in a few keystrokes, there were 42 pages of emails, the whole chain of decision-making about the banning, all unredacted. I heard the person who sent me the FOIA was gone soon after, but I like to think that she was on her way out and giving a finger to the whole system."

He learned that the spark of the ban, the initial outrage, didn't come from a parent but a CPS network chief, a middle-manager and administrator in charge of one of CPS's many clusters of schools, of which there are more than 600 elementary and secondary schools. He learned, though Bennett had denied being involved, that she was on all 42 pages of emails: "When the person who wanted 'Persepolis' removed brought it up, she almost immediately agrees, then figures, while they're at it, get it out of every school."

He learned CPS wanted to know who approved the book, which had been a part of its curriculum then for eight years. He learned that other books were suggested for removal.

Flanagan rolled her eyes.

"I taught English for 25 years and had parents object to books twice. One time, a parent flipped open 'My Bloody Life' (the autobiography of a former member of the Latin Kings street gang in Chicago), and they saw a sex scene, so I met with my principal, who was supportive about it and I remember he started the meeting: 'So I hear you're teaching porn?' The other time was a book of Greek mythology; the parent had religious reasons. I don't even think they wanted the book banned, they just didn't want their kid reading it. See, you don't want to pick this fight in Chicago. We have structures in place to deal with it."

Since that incident over "Persepolis," Flanagan left teaching to become a project organizer for the Chicago Teachers Union, specializing in academic freedom and combating censorship challenges. Dapier, who had been in Evanston five and a half years, is now a school liaison and youth librarian for the Niles-Maine District Library.

Part of the confusion with the ban was that "Persepolis" could still be checked out of the Lane Tech library, and when CPS brought back the book, it was often unclear which students were allowed to read it. Flanagan – who described the reinstatement as "convoluted at best" – noted the best result of the incident was: "Now we have a solid process for curriculum challenges, so someone can't just storm into a school-board meeting to demand a book pulled. There's an order of steps, starting at the school, not top down. It's a big school system, a big teachers union. We're not a soft target."

That said, soon after the ban, then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel announced the closing of 50 schools; and soon after that, he announced the implementation of a new funding formula, Student-Based Budgeting, which Flanagan characterized as: "Each school receives a certain dollar amount for each student and that's used for toilet paper and it's used for teachers and when a school librarian needs a minimum of a masters degree, they become some of the first pushed out. You don't have to ban books at all when you just fire the school librarians and claim that you are doing the fiscally responsible thing."

"A lot of schools now have old libraries being used as storage rooms," Dapier said.

Flanagan nodded. "I used to think it was weird when a school didn't have a library, and now I'm pleasantly surprised these days when a school in Chicago has a library at all."

Thirteen years ago, CPS had several hundred school librarians. Today, according to the Chicago Teachers Union, there are 77 librarians for 600 schools, with plans, as a part of the latest teachers' contract, to add another 90 librarians by 2028.

"Persepolis" is still being taught in CPS.

Book bans themselves remain a unicorn in Chicago. After a wave of attempts in 2022 to remove certain books from libraries in Chicago suburbs and small Illinois towns – often led by groups like Moms for Liberty, which characterizes itself as reclaiming "parental rights" – the state passed legislation to protect Illinois libraries from book bans, the first legislation of its kind in the country.

But the truth, Dapier said, "is it's almost impossible to track (all challenges), or if a library is not ordering certain books to avoid a challenge."

According to a study last fall by PEN America, the nonprofit free-expression advocacy group, book challenges in the United States are almost normal now: "Never before in the life of any living American have so many books been systematically removed from school libraries across the country." In 2013, the ALA knew of 307 challenges to reading materials in American libraries – both public and school libraries. During the 2024-25 academic year, PEN America recorded 6,870 book challenges in school libraries alone.

As if on cue, the Chicago-based YA author Jessie Ann Foley leaned in to say hello.

"Banned author!" Dapier exclaimed.

Indeed, Foley's first novel, "The Carnival at Bray," about a Chicago teenager who moves to Ireland, was removed from schools in 10 states. "Ten that I know of," Foley admitted. "They said it was without literary merit, since there were two sex scenes. The funny thing is, when it was being banned, I was published by a tiny press that was folding, and because the ban renewed interest, it got reissued by a way larger press, HarperCollins."

She took a place at the back of the crowded room and the party started.

Flanagan called out: "Raise your hand if you are or have been a CPS librarian."

A cheer went up.

She looked relieved.

BESTSELLERS

Here are the bestsellers for the week that ended Saturday, March 21, compiled from data from independent and chain bookstores, book wholesalers and independent distributors nationwide, powered by Circana BookScan.

Hardcover fiction

1. Judge Stone. Davis/Patterson. Little, Brown
2. The Correspondent. Virginia Evans. Crown
3. My Husband's Wife. Alice Feeney. Pine & Cedar
4. Bloodlust. Sandra Brown. Grand Central
5. Innamorata. Ava Reid. Del Rey
6. Mother of Death and Dawn. Carissa Broadbent. Bramble
7. Between Two Fires. Christopher Buehlman. Tor Nightfire
8. Kin. Tayari Jones. Knopf
9. The Wings That Bind (deluxe ed.). Briar Boleyn. Mira
10. Alchemised. SenLinYu. Del Rey

Hardcover nonfiction

1. Of Course It's Good! Jessica Secrest. Page Street
2. Stripped Down. Bunnie Xo. Dey Street
3. Nothing Is Impossible with God. Shannon Bream. Harper Influence
4. Killed to Order. Jan Jekielek. Skyhorse
5. Control. Glen Galaich. Wiley
6. Make Your Own. Javant Benton. Balance
7. One Plate at a Time. Demi Lovato. Flatiron
8. Kids, Wait Till You Hear This! Liza Minnelli. Grand Central
9. You with the Sad Eyes. Christina Applegate. Little, Brown
10. Strangers. Belle Burden. Dial

Trade paperback

1. Theo of Golden. Allen Levi. Atria
2. Love Song. Elle Kennedy. Bloom
3. Dear Debbie. Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen
4. Want to Know a Secret? Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen
5. Dungeon Crawler Carl. Matt Dinniman. Ace
6. Reminders of Him. Colleen Hoover. Montlake
7. Mistakes Were Made. Lucy Score. Bloom
8. Solo Leveling, Vol. 15. Chugong/h-goon. Ize
9. Strange Buildings. Uketsu. HarperVia
10. Remarkably Bright Creatures. Shelby Van Pelt. Ecco

Reprinted from Publishers Weekly.

Bob Woodward to 'lift the lid' on decades of reporting in new memoir 'Secrets'

By HILLEL ITALIE
AP National Writer

Bob Woodward's next book will be an inside account of how the bestselling author and award-winning journalist came to write so many inside accounts.

"Secrets: A Reporter's Memoir" will offer Woodward's take on some of the government leaders he has known and the news he has helped break, from Watergate to the inner workings of the Trump administration.

Simon & Schuster announced Tuesday that "Secrets" will come out Sept. 29.

"He has kept notes, transcripts and files of all of his interviews with the most important players in Washington," the publisher's announcement reads in part.

"For the first time in this one-of-a-kind reporting memoir, Woodward lifts the lid on his historic reporting relationships, some spanning several decades."

Woodward, who turns 83 this week, became famous in the 1970s when he and fellow Washington Post journalist Carl Bernstein helped break the Watergate scandal and other news about the Nixon administration that eventually led to President Richard Nixon's resignation.

Woodward also has written or co-written more than 20 bestsellers, including "All the President's Men," "Bush at War" and the Trump books "Rage" and "Fear."

Ripping up the rulebook

China creates new benchmark for global auto industry

By BLOOMBERG NEWS (TNS)

CN-STR / AFP via Getty Images / TNS

A Leapmotor C10 model car is displayed at a showroom in its headquarters in Hangzhou, in eastern China's Zhejiang province, on May 14, 2024.

A Chinese-made Leapmotor C10 was traveling down Germany's fast-moving Autobahn last year when the driver-assistance system braked sharply and jolted it to the side, as if boxed in by scooters in a crowded China megacity.

Leapmotor International's Germany head, Martin Resch, was at the wheel and emailed engineers in Hangzhou to report the problem before going into a meeting. By the time he got out, a software update had been beamed to the electric vehicle, smoothing its behavior. A similar fix at a European carmaker would have taken weeks.

Executives call it China Speed, and it's the global auto industry's new benchmark.

For decades, carmakers measured themselves against German engineering, Detroit scale or Japanese reliability. Now executives from Michigan to Wolfsburg are confronting a new yardstick – one defined by rapid-fire development cycles, software-first design and relentless cost compression born of China's EV boom.

Just as Japan's ascent in the 1970s reshaped the industry with lean production and ruthless efficiency, China's rise – led by companies like BYD, Geely and Leapmotor – is rewriting the rules again, with flatter development timelines, deep supply chain integration, bold ideas and cars that gain new features in real time through over-the-air updates. The result turns on its head the industry's goal to sell perfect products, creating one where fixes can come later – though sometimes at a cost.

The shift is no longer theoretical. Stellantis is weighing whether to use EV platforms and software from Leapmotor to underpin models for its European brands Fiat, Opel and Peugeot, and is separately talking with Xiaomi Corp. and Xpeng Inc. about investing in its European operations, Bloomberg has reported. It's a striking admission that major legacy manufacturers may need Chinese engineering to compete on their own turf.

The technology seep goes beyond the mass market, with luxury-car maker Mercedes-Benz Group AG holding early talks with Geely for possible cooperation on future EVs, Bloomberg has reported.

Japanese carmakers are also tapping into Chinese expertise. Nissan Motor Co., which pioneered the battery-car market with its Leaf in 2010, is now relying on China to become a springboard for EV exports, investing at least $1.4 billion to develop battery-powered cars on the mainland for sale abroad.

"What China gives us is access to the same advantages that have reshaped the competitive landscape: speed, technology and cost," outgoing Nissan Chief Financial Officer Jérémie Papin said in an interview. "You will start to see the first of these China-sourced products reach global markets soon.''

In the U.S., where protectionist walls have long kept Chinese automakers out, cracks are starting to show. As China makes inroads in Mexico and Canada, Ford Motor Co. has talked with President Donald Trump's administration about how U.S.-China joint ventures might be structured when China inevitably enters the domestic market – a scenario Chief Executive Officer Jim Farley has labeled an "existential threat."

Dismissed for decades as a low-cost outpost for copycat engineering, China has poured resources into a state-backed race to dominate advanced manufacturing. In EVs alone, government support has totaled at least $230 billion since 2009, according to the Center for Strategic & International Studies.

While legacy automakers are trying to reduce their typical five- to seven-year product plans, their Chinese rivals can deliver a new model in under two years. Founders at Xpeng, Nio and Li Auto all had internet startups, and Lei Jun of Xiaomi has a background in software.

Workforces skew young and mobile, and payscales are lower than at Western counterparts – with compensation often tied to financial targets, fostering an entrepreneurial culture. Ferocious domestic competition forces continual innovation and squeezes out inefficiencies.

Patent data reflect China's rise to the top of the pecking order. It generated more than 343,000 patents in future land transportation technologies from 2000 to 2023 – almost five times Germany's total – and has driven most of the global growth since 2018, according to the World Intellectual Property Organization.

Beijing's long-term financial support means China Speed is as much a product of state backing as industrial prowess, with periodic bailouts and aid to some businesses unlikely to become self-sustaining over the long run.

No matter, the impact is real. To stay competitive, automakers and suppliers from outside of China are locating a growing share of their engineering brainpower there.

Robert Bosch GmbH, the world's largest traditional auto-parts supplier, is shedding thousands of manufacturing and development jobs across Baden-Württemberg, the German state where Carl Benz invented the automobile in the 1880s, to shift work in areas such as battery and driver-assistance systems to China.

Some European executives describe this as a "Nokia moment" – a reference to when Apple Inc.'s iPhone crushed the Finnish mobile-phone leader. Europe's auto champions may be forced to choose between clinging to a dying business model or plugging into Chinese technology to survive.

Measured against the new reality, Germany is "simply no longer productive enough," Chancellor Friedrich Merz said in late February after returning from China. "Work-life balance and a four-day week will not sustain prosperity in our country in the long term," he told reporters. "We simply have to do more now."

Where European carmakers once set the standards for carmaking collaborations, they are increasingly forced to adopt Chinese platforms and engineering practices.

For Bosch, the advantage has as much to do with speed as with costs: in one project, engineers in Suzhou, near Shanghai, redesigned an electrical connector in six months – roughly half the time it would have taken teams in Germany, according to people familiar with the matter.

A Bosch spokesperson declined to comment on specific projects. They added that Chinese development timelines are typically much shorter, and described the country as a key innovation hub for the company.

At the Hangzhou Bay research hub of Geely Auto – part of a constellation including Lynk & Co, Zeekr, Polestar, Volvo and Lotus – the lights are sometimes on 24/7 and engineers stream in and out of glass-walled labs, compressing concept-to-production cycles. The extra shifts can't be matched in Europe due to workplace restrictions.

Physical proximity between design, manufacturing and suppliers – fostered by Tesla Inc.'s Shanghai factory, opened in 2019 – also speeds development and eases communication. In the Yangtze River Delta, an EV maker can often find every component within a 200-mile radius – narrowing lead times for prototyping and logistics, and lowering barriers for would-be automakers with software or design roots to launch a company, even if they lack deep manufacturing experience.

Leapmotor, whose founder Zhu Jiangming started in electronics, self-develops most core components, including battery, motor and the electronic control system, as well as smart driving technology. When a problem crops up, a team is in place and can quickly respond, as Resch, the executive in Germany, witnessed from the Autobahn.

"You're starting from a piece of white paper and you're able to optimize everything," said Tianshu Xin, CEO of the Leapmotor International venture between the Chinese carmaker and Stellantis. Greater control over design and component flows allows manufacturers to fine-tune for speed at every stage of production. "This engineering culture permeates the entire ecosystem from the ground up."

In the software-industry mindset of China's newer crop of automakers, new features don't have to be perfect when cars are shipped – sometimes they can merely be functional, with updates and fixes arriving later.

John Paul MacDuffie, a professor at Pennsylvania's Wharton School who has researched Chinese production methods, said there's a higher tolerance for mistakes, partly growing out of flatter hierarchies and aggressive work cultures, while also citing techniques used to accelerate development.

"Much of the speed comes from companies beginning production before validation is complete, and compressing development stages so they overlap rather than waiting for the previous phase to finish," MacDuffie said.

This ship-then-fix approach has led to concerns about reliability. In October, JD Power's annual survey found declining dependability of cars sold in China for the second year running, with the top Japanese and American JVs performing better than local brands. Inadequate R&D validation systems and mounting cost pressures are "now emerging as a systemic risk to overall quality stability,'' it said.

Chinese regulators have separately sought to rein in a long-running price war that they worried would lead manufacturers to cut corners on vehicle safety.

Geely's Lynk & Co went viral in late February, after a Z20 compact SUV turned off its headlights at night by mistake, when the driver asked to shut an interior reading light. The glitch plunged the vehicle into darkness, and it eventually crashed into a roadside median.

No one was hurt but the online maelstrom that followed raised questions about reliability and the inadvertent outsourcing of product testing to customers. Mu Jun, a Lynk & Co senior executive, apologized and a software patch was installed to prevent headlights switching off by voice, according to a post last month on Weibo.

Growing clout

China's growing clout is partly an outgrowth of earlier decisions by European, US and Japanese carmakers to locate manufacturing there in exchange for access to its fast-growing market, said Kai Gramke, CEO of EconSight, a consulting firm that tracks patent trends. Innovation tends to follow manufacturing, he said, with many Chinese patents related to advanced technologies such as batteries, EVs, AI and autonomous driving.

"In the past, China has bought European designed cars or US designed cars," he said. "In the future, we might be buying Chinese designed cars with all the Chinese specifics."

In Europe, where Chinese brands have claimed a growing share of sales, the pace and depth of collaboration is accelerating. Renault developed its new Twingo EV at its Shanghai-based R&D center, and will source 40 percent of its parts, in terms of value, from the mainland. This month, Leapmotor confirmed it's in talks with Stellantis to expand their cooperation on cars and components.

Audi is working with SAIC Motor Corp. to develop electric models on a local platform for sale in China, while its parent Volkswagen has teamed up with Xpeng, including through platform sharing, to sharpen its competitiveness in China.

Narrower gap

Chinese automakers have spent nearly five decades narrowing the gap. In 1978, a Chinese delegation appeared at Volkswagen's gates in Wolfsburg, Germany, offering market access in return for know-how – a bargain that led to Shanghai Volkswagen and a web of JVs pairing German engineering with Chinese scale.

Volkswagen, BMW and Mercedes-Benz feasted for years on China's explosive demand, reaping sales and profit and secure factory jobs back home.

Over time, Beijing set out to redraw the terms of trade. Automotive technology was elevated to a strategic priority under the "Made in China 2025" plan to dominate advanced manufacturing. Wan Gang – a former Audi engineer who became China's science and technology minister – championed EVs as a shortcut past combustion incumbents, and steered billions into battery research.

Now, China leads global battery production through companies such as BYD and CATL, commands critical stretches of the EV supply chain and sets the tempo in automotive software, from digital cockpits to over-the-air updates.

Chinese carmakers have used their cost and speed advantage to churn out affordable models at a time when consumers, stung by repeat crises in the global economy, have less money in their wallets. European automakers and their suppliers have no chance to compete on cost, said Barbara Resch, a Mercedes supervisory board member and head of the IG Metall union in Baden-Württemberg.

"We are at a decisive juncture," she said. "If policymakers fail to set the right course, future technologies such as battery and hydrogen drives will migrate out of Baden-Württemberg."

Nissan, for its part, will target its Chinese-developed EVs to markets in the Middle East and the Southern Hemisphere, where competition from Chinese brands is most intense, CFO Papin said. The company has rolled out three of the 10 models it has said it plans to debut in China, including the fully electric N7, which did surprisingly well after sales opened last April.

Ford CEO Farley, a fan of Xiaomi's SU7 EV, has been seeking a way to structure American-controlled JVs so that both the Chinese and US partners would share profits and technology, Bloomberg reported in February.

"It would make sense for US automakers to leverage what European players are already doing," said Augustin Friedel, associated partner at MHP, a management and IT consultancy owned by Porsche AG.

After writing down billions in investments in EVs, some auto-industry incumbents have retreated to the relative safety of high-margin combustion models. Yet the move favoring short-term gains puts legacy automakers further behind in the energy transition that's still moving forward and likely to be accelerated by the oil price shock from the Iran war.

For now, U.S. tariffs on Chinese cars protect American manufacturers from domestic competition. Trump's rollback of EV subsidies and emissions mandates also makes the math harder for selling battery-powered models. European Union regulators have thrown up less-firm barriers, levying tariffs on Chinese-made EVs that were swiftly countered with hybrids and commitments to build locally.

In the meantime, Chinese carmakers have made inroads in places like Brazil, Mexico, the U.K. and the Middle East – eating away at markets that have been strongholds for Ford, General Motors Co. or Mercedes. Analysts at UBS estimate that battery cells alone give Chinese automakers like BYD a $2,000 cost advantage per vehicle, and predict they'll grow their global market share to 35 percent by 2030 from 25 percent in 2025, mainly with export sales.

"We see this advantage persisting, thanks to China's scale, R&D leadership and supply chain depth," analysts led by Patrick Hummel said in February.

It's an open question how much of their cost advantages Chinese automakers could replicate building cars in the U.S. or in Europe, said Terry Woychowski, a former GM executive who is now president at Caresoft Global, an engineering consultancy. It would cost about $3,000 to make Xiaomi's new YU7, a competitor to Tesla's Model Y, compliant in the U.S. market, he estimates.

Touting quality and dependability could potentially be an avenue for automakers from Europe, Japan and the U.S. to capitalize where they still have a perceived edge. Yet despite the recent backsliding, Chinese carmakers have narrowed the initial quality gap over the past decade-and-a-half, based on JD Power's annual surveys. Japanese, U.S. and European brands maintain a significant advantage in dependability, which measures longer-term reliability.

In the end, there's little debate among top executives that China is setting the pace – signaling a bumpy and unpredictable future for the automakers who defined the combustion era, along with the millions of people in Europe and the U.S. who depend on the industry for their livelihoods.

Germany can learn from China's "systemic approach," Volkswagen CEO Oliver Blume said in an interview with Germany's Bild newspaper, saying its five-year plans, discipline and clear priorities optimize the industry's structure.

"There is no other region in the world where the transformation of our industry is taking place more consistently, dynamically, or rapidly," the CEO said at an event in Berlin in January. "In China, it is decided who will be at the forefront of this transformation."

TECHNOLOGY

Apple's new cheap laptop: Wait, what?

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Apple has introduced a new low-cost laptop called the MacBook Neo.

I know Apple laptop and "low cost" usually don't go together. Apple has never been a company known for inexpensive hardware.

Previously, Apple's lowest price laptop was the MacBook Air (starting at $1,099), but the new $599 Neo is a full $500 cheaper.

So, why is the Neo so cheap and who is the target market?

The MacBook Neo has a 13-inch screen that's the same LED panel used in the MacBook Air. It has a similar aluminum body with a Magic keyboard, but there is no backlighting on the keys. Also, the multi-touch trackpad is not haptic. It has a physical button underneath the trackpad that clicks.

Neo uses the same A18 Pro CPU used in the iPhone 16 Pro, instead of the usual Apple Silicon M processors. But in real use, the A18 Pro specs out slightly faster than the M1, and it has no problem running MacOS 26. It gets 16 hours of life from its battery.

Connectivity includes 2 USB-C ports, one USB-C 3.0 and one USB-C 2.0. The faster USB port can connect to a single 4K external monitor. It also has a headphone jack and side-firing stereo speakers. It has a 1080P FaceTime camera and comes in two configurations.

Both Neo models have 8 gigabytes of RAM. The $599 model has 256GB of storage. The second model costs $699, but you get a storage bump up to 512GB and get a TouchID fingerprint reader on the keyboard.

The Neo comes in four colors – silver, blush (pink), citrus (yellow/green) and Indigo (dark blue) and the keys are color matched to the body color.

Who should be looking to buy the Neo?

Casual users and students. The Neo is going to be hugely popular on high school and college campuses. The Neo is the perfect choice for people who just need a laptop for the basics – internet surfing, email, online shopping, watching Netflix, casual gaming and all types of student activities like writing papers, creating spreadsheets and making presentations.

The Neo would be perfect for my wife (a preschool music teacher) or my mom.

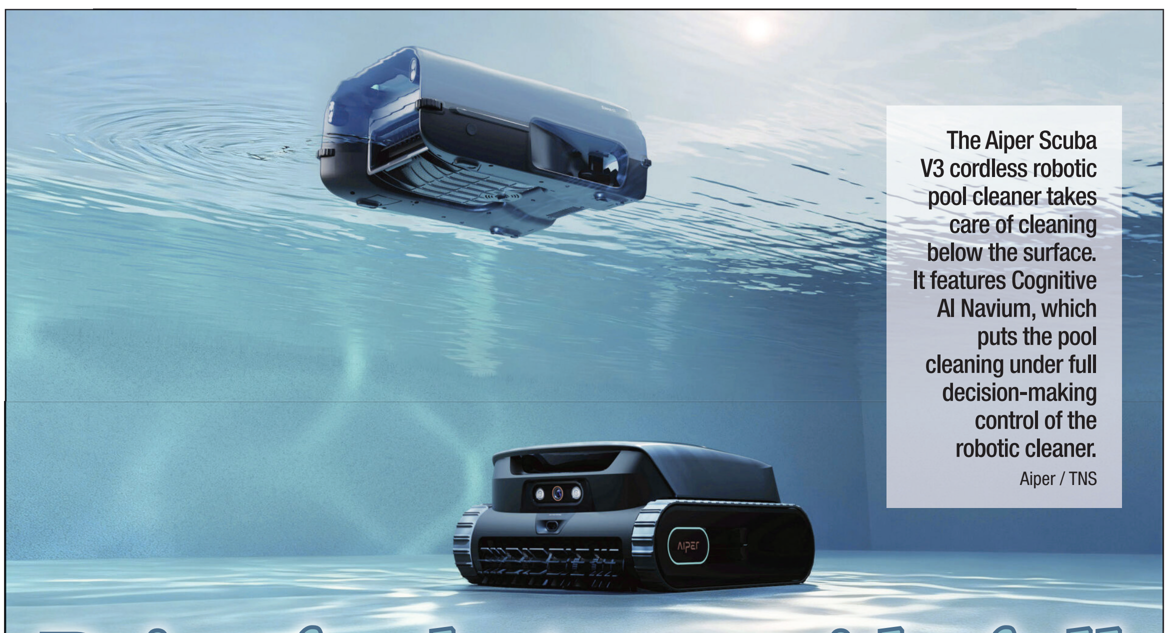
If you're worried at all that you might need more storage or more RAM, or if you make your living with a computer, you should be looking to buy a MacBook Air or MacBook Pro.

Lastly, if you are a college student, parent of a college student or a faculty or staff at any level school, you qualify for Apple's education discount that drops the price of the Neo down to $499. That education price is available online or even in Apple retail stores.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossmantechadviser@gmail.com.

Apple's new cheap MacBook Neo.
Apple / TNS

GADGETS



The Aiper Scuba V3 cordless robotic pool cleaner takes care of cleaning below the surface. It features Cognitive AI Navium, which puts the pool cleaning under full decision-making control of the robotic cleaner.
Aiper / TNS

Pair of robots provide full coverage for pool cleaning

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Aiper, a world leader in smart robotic pool cleaners (and smart yard innovations), launched Aiper Experts Duo, with the EcoSurfer S2 and the Scuba V3 robotic pool cleaners, with an impressive display and demonstration at the Consumer Electronics Show in January. The system is an intelligent two-robot system, working completely hands-free to keep your pool clean from top to bottom with full 360-degree coverage.

For the surface, the **Aiper EcoSurfer S2 cordless robotic pool skimme**r can clean continuously 24/7 and recharges itself with its built-in top-mounted solar panel. The cleaner's body is built from UV-resistant, high-temperature, saltwater-safe materials.

From a dead battery needing a boost, the EcoSurfer S2 is rated to take just 15 minutes of solar charging to get going. The SolarSeeker technology will automatically seek out some sunlight when the battery runs low. You can also remove it from the water and connect it for manual AC charging. A full charge lasts for about 35 hours of vacuuming.

A pair of optical sensors help navigate the water to locate debris that needs to be removed, ensuring uninterrupted, efficient, and hassle-free pool cleaning. At the bottom are four adjustable anti-stranding columns that allow it to adapt to changing pool depths and configurations, ensuring it won't get stuck on steps or in shallow areas.

During the display, it skimmed the surface side to side and edge to edge, ensuring any debris in its path on the waterline would be captured. While it's doing its thing, you are in full control via the Aiper app to turn it on or off, set clogging alerts, and make any adjustments you want or need. Among the features in the Aiper app are real-time alerts, which allow you to monitor the pool robot's performance, schedule runtime, and optimize energy use.

The EcoSurfer S2 features an industry-first adjustable chlorine dispenser that holds a single 3-inch chlorine tablet and is manually adjusted on the EcoSurfer S2. It dispenses automatically while it cleans and is a great asset for daily use, especially to keep your water chlorinated during short vacations. It also allows for manual adjustment of flow rate to ensure the pool's salt-chlorine level stays within a healthy range.

The **Aiper Scuba V3 cordless robotic pool cleaner** takes care of cleaning below the surface. It features Cognitive AI Navium, which puts the pool cleaning under full decision-making control of the robotic cleaner.

Aiper markets the Scuba V3 as the world's first cognitive AI-powered essential robotic pool cleaner. The technology inside to make this happen includes Cognitive AI Navium mode, AI Patrol cleaning and AI VisionPath adaptive patch cleaning. What this means to you is you'll have a clean pool.

Using the pool vacuum couldn't be easier. A pair of brushes with 4800 GPH suction are on the bottom, and with the single press of a button, the system is activated for full pool cleaning. The AI Patrol Cleaning will detect over 20 debris types and scoop them away into its filter basket. This includes heavier debris, such as leaves, and microitems as small as sand and other ultra-fine particles.

The EcoSurfer S2 features a DebrisGuard leakproof baffle design that prevents debris from leaking back into the pool. The Scuba V3 has a 180-micron debris filter with a 3-micron ultra-fine layer to capture sand, algae and tiny particles.

With the Cognitive AI Navium mode, the Scuba V3 will make a plan using pool size, weather and cleaning history – optimizing power and timing for hands-free maintenance. It has dual LED lights, which empower the Al vision system to perform intelligently even in the darkest times. VisionPatch uses AI vision to plan cleaning routes that avoid obstacles, including pool drains and skimmers.

For the waterline, it has JetAssist horizontal waterline cleaning to scrub it free. If you are a pool owner, you know this is one of the most tedious cleaning tasks you can have. Now you can let the Scuba V3 do it for you.

And when the cleaning is done, with an easy retrieval system, the 18-pound cleaner will dock at the waterline so you can lift it out and place it in its charging dock, ready for the next cleaning. The debris is stored in onboard baskets, which easily open for use on both the Scuba V3 and the EcoSurfer S2.

The Aiper Experts Duo is $1,299.99; purchased individually the Scuba V3 is $999.99 and EcoSurfer S2 is $369.99.

https://aiper.store/us/products/aiper-experts-duo

Contact Gregg Ellman at greggellman@mac.com. Follow him on Twitter @greggellman.

How to take the sound on TLC TVs to the next level

By DON LINDICH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Q. You mentioned that the TCL QM9K television sounded so good that an external soundbar was not necessary. I find that most televisions sound awful, but would like to avoid getting a soundbar if I can. Is a home entertainment fan likely to want a soundbar anyway?

– L.S., Kansas City, Missouri

A. I think it is fine without a soundbar, but it is very easy to take it to the next level. The $299.99 TCL Z100-SW Wireless Subwoofer and $249.99 Z100 Wireless Home Theater Speaker with Dolby Atmos can pair wirelessly with the QM9K's Bang & Olufsen sound system to create impressive home theater sound very easily. In fact, it is the easiest system to set up and enjoy that I have ever tested, and the results are fantastic.

The Z100 speakers are heavy, solidly built and beautifully finished. The Z100 subwoofer is very compact and though the woofer driver is only 5.25 inches in diameter, it still had strong and satisfying impact in a midsize room. Setup could not be simpler. The quick start guide walks you through the process starting with plugging in the subwoofer, then going to the audio menu on the television. The television automatically finds and pairs the subwoofer, then uses test tones to calibrate it for room placement and acoustics.

Adding the Z100 subwoofer raises the television's already excellent sound to an entirely new level. Supplemented by the subwoofer output, the television's sound system was even more effective and subjectively seemed twice as good as before, and that is really saying something. The sound was seamlessly integrated from bass to treble with no weakness in any part of the sonic spectrum, and a wall of sound coming from the television filled the room. If you have invested in this television I think the subwoofer is practically a must-have. The simplicity, sound quality and total cost make it my preferred option over adding a separate soundbar and subwoofer, especially for only $299.99.

In addition to the subwoofer you can use one to four of the Z100 Atmos speakers with the system. I started by putting a single Z100 speaker in the back corner of the room. Once again, the speaker paired with the television effortlessly and automatically configured itself for surround duty based on placement and room acoustics. The system knows how many Z100 speakers there are and where they are placed, and distributes the sound accordingly.

Using a single Z100 speaker with the QM9K television and Z100 subwoofer provided beautiful, immersive sound, much better than I would have expected given the simplicity of the system. I am very picky and have a complicated and elaborate home theater in my home. I realize this is more than most people want or need, and think this combination of an outstanding television sound system, wirelessly connected to a subwoofer and a single, strategically placed surround speaker is exactly what many people are looking for. It provides rich, thrilling and impactful sound, doesn't crowd your room with lots of speakers and has easy, automated setup and optimization.

Using four Z100 speakers in conjunction with the subwoofer would run around $1,300, at which point there is serious competition from separate soundbar systems that have much bigger subwoofers and can play much louder. If you're going to spend that much you should expand your shopping list, but I think adding the Z100 subwoofer and a Z100 Atmos speaker to a compatible TV, especially the QM9K with its outstanding Bang & Olufsen sound system, is an absolutely great move.

The Z100 speakers are compatible with TCL televisions with Dolby Atmos FlexConnect, which include the QM6K, QM7K, QM8K and QM9K.

tcl.com

Contact Don Lindich at www.soundadvicenews.com.

Phongsak Sangkhamanee via Getty Images

Is Suno a bonanza for making AI-generated music, or an existential threat?

By GEORGE VARGA
The San Diego Union-Tribune (TNS)

Dreamstime / TNS

Since the debut of Suno and Udio in late 2023 and early 2024, respectively, AI-produced music has grown at a dizzying rate.

SAN DIEGO — Is AI an invaluable tool for musicians – or an existential threat?

Controversy about new technology has been a constant in the music industry since the first mechanically operated player pianos were patented in the late 1800s.

But the level of controversy may now be reaching new heights, thanks to Suno, Udio and other AI music creation platforms that allow anyone to make nearly professional-caliber recordings – free or for a very low fee – with little or no human participation whatsoever.

Since the debut of Suno and Udio in late 2023 and early 2024, respectively, AI-produced music has grown at a dizzying rate. The resulting sonic Pandora's box is changing, perhaps irrevocably, how music is created and consumed, valued and devalued.

In November, the iHeartRadio network announced its new "Guaranteed Human" initiative and promised not to "play AI music that features synthetic vocalists pretending to be human" or "use AI-generated personalities" as on-air DJs.

Also in November, "Walk My Walk" by Breaking Rust topped Billboard's Country Digital Song Sales chart, despite – or perhaps because – the song and the performer are both entirely AI-generated.

In October, "A.I.-native pop artist" TaTa Taktumi's debut album, "Faithful Soul," became a hit on iTunes (with a real-life human performer playing the role of TaTa for one of the album's videos).

In September, the independent record label Hallwood Media signed a multimillion-dollar contract with the creators of Xania Monet, an AI-generated singer and image.

Taktumi is the brainchild of Timbaland, the four-time Grammy Award-winning producer, songwriter, rapper and singer who is Suno's strategic adviser and public ambassador.

Welcoming 'Artificial Pop'

"I'm not just producing tracks anymore. I'm producing systems, stories, and stars from scratch," Timbaland told Billboard magazine last year. "(TaTa) is not an avatar. She is not a character. TaTa is a living, learning, autonomous music artist built with AI. … She's the first artist of a new generation. A-Pop (Artificial Pop) is the next cultural evolution, and TaTa is its first icon."

Not surprisingly, there is growing opposition to AI-generated music. It can – left unchecked – simulate the exact sound and style of young and established performers and songwriters alike, and their songs, without providing any credit or compensation to those artists.

Everyone from Paul McCartney, Billie Eilish and Doechii to Miranda Lambert, Nicki Minaj and the members of Pearl Jam have expressed alarm, while Grimes, EDM star David Guetta and others have welcomed AI as a tool for music-making.

San Diego's Jack Tempchin – a 2019 Songwriters Hall of Fame inductee who has written major hits for the Eagles, Johnny Rivers and other artists – embraced Suno to make his two new studio albums, "The Magic Mirror" and "All Kinds of Love."

He applauds Suno for the ease and speed – "two minutes!" – with which it can set his lyrics to music and transform them into a song. Suno devised all the vocals, instrumentation, arrangements, production, mixing and mastering for all of Tempchin's songs on both those albums.

"That's the miracle of this technology," he said of Suno.

The company has positioned itself as a ChatGPT equivalent for anyone who wants to make songs. It does so through the automated (and almost automatic) composition of musical elements that have been fed into a massive database.

Tempchin also credits Suno for quickly reaching out to him when he contacted the company with questions about how to use its technology, which Suno has provided to him free of charge.

His enthusiasm is shared by Michael Hand, a lifelong musician who – full disclosure – I have known since buying a guitar amplifier from him in Frankfurt, Germany, when we were both junior high school students.

A lifelong musician now based in Central California, Hand regularly records in his home studio and releases his music online under the name Planthand. He is excited about how Suno enables him to now reimagine songs he wrote decades ago.

"I have been roped in and am entranced by Suno," Hand said. "I feed it lyrics of my songs, decide if the vocal should be male or female, and then use Suno's prompts to indicate the style, rhythms and instruments I want to use.

"It seamlessly integrates to your studio software. You want a gospel choir to sing your refrain? It takes maybe five minutes, and you can fashion the choir from a ragged backwoods church to a big city choir! And it sounds totally real because the learning machine has been fed a thousand gospel choirs. So, the AI knows nuances.

"For the first time, I can hear my old songs the way I envisioned them. It is very exciting and inspiring."

Other artists express consternation, not enthusiasm, about the potential of this new technology to upend the craft of making music and to diminish – or even eliminate – the need for human creativity and interaction.

'Really concerned'

"AI is racing at us like a wildfire and legislation moves so slowly," said Alison Brown, a Grammy Award-winning banjo player and La Jolla High School alum.

She is the co-founder of Compass Records and an adjunct faculty member at Vanderbilt University's Blair School of Music. A Harvard Business School graduate, she is also the president of the Nashville chapter of the Recording Academy, under whose auspices the Grammy Awards are presented.

"This is such a critical moment for music creators," said Brown, whose 2025 album, "Safe, Sensible and Sane," teams her with comedy legend and longtime banjo enthusiast Steve Martin.

Prior to a Nashville Recording Academy chapter leadership meeting last fall, Brown used Suno to create a bluegrass song.

"I played it at the meeting and everyone was shocked at how great it sounded," she said. "A lot of our members are very worried and we all have to figure out how to deal with it. I'm really concerned about the misuse of AI."

Suno offers a Free Plan that enables customers to use the platform to make up to 10 songs a day, provided they are one minute or less in length. Its Pro Plan, priced at $8 a month, allows up to 500 songs that can be up to 8 minutes each in length. The Premier Plan, which costs $24 a month, ups the ante even higher to 2,000 songs. Both the Pro and Premier plans give users commercial rights to any new songs the users make using Suno.

But musicians do not appear to be Suno's target audience, as the company's CEO, Mikey Shulman, made clear in a 20VC podcast early last year.

"It's not really enjoyable to make music now," he said in the podcast. "It takes a lot of time, it takes a lot of practice, you need to get really good at an instrument or really good at a piece of production software. I think the majority of people don't enjoy the majority of the time they spend making music."

Schuman has since sought to downplay his comments, which garnered near-instant blowback.

At San Diego singer-songwriter Tempchin's suggestion, the Union-Tribune reached out to Suno Chief Music Officer Paul Sinclair to discuss the company, its product and its goals. Sinclair did not respond to multiple email requests for an interview until several days after the deadline for this article.

'It's replacing all musicians'

By his own admission, Tempchin reacted with alarm when he first learned about Suno about two years ago.

"Like every other musician, I said: 'I don't want anything to do with that'," he recalled. "I'm a songwriter. I want to write my own songs. When Suno created the ability to put your own song in Suno and have it do a version of your song, that's when I became interested in it.

"Almost every musician is not open to it because it's replacing all musicians. For me as a songwriter right now, I put my songs in Suno and it's kind of like having a band record my songs – which I always did – except it's not real. So, that's OK for me right now."

Even so, Tempchin is well aware that the potential existential threat posed by AI extends well beyond musicians.

"What about all the people that play on all the demos of songs and on all the records?" he mused. "They're becoming irrelevant, just like doctors, lawyers and people in all kinds of professions. They will be replaced pretty soon by AI because it can do almost anything humans can do. And musicians are (among) the first in line to be replaced.

"Pretty soon, everybody – no matter what you do – is going to be replaced by these super intelligent machines. So, yeah, it's very concerning. But I'm just making do with what exists in the world and getting my music out, you know?"

The blurred lines created by AI have not gone unnoticed by the Recording Academy, under whose auspices the Grammy Awards are presented. Academy President and CEO Harvey Mason Jr. addressed the issue in a January interview with the San Diego Union-Tribune.

"The Grammys, for now, are not going to be awarding or nominating any music that is written by AI in the songwriting category," Mason said. "Furthermore, we will not be awarding a Grammy to any AI artists who perform songs in any performance categories.

"Having said that, AI does not disqualify someone from entering. If an AI artist sang a song that was written by a human, and it wins, we'll give the human a Grammy for the songwriting. And vice versa: If AI writes a song and a great singer sings the heck out of it and deserves a Grammy, they will be awarded one."

A number of 2026 Grammy-winners were asked backstage by the Union-Tribune to weigh in on AI's role in music. Not one of them spoke in favor of it.

"We are living in an age when human beings are not playing together and AI is kind of taking over." said jazz drummer, composer and band leader Nate Smith, who won two Grammys this year. "It's incumbent on the recording industry to protect the rights of recording artists."

Similar sentiments were expressed by Justin Gray, who won the 2026 Grammy for Best Immersive Audio Album for his aptly named "Immersive."

"Technology is at its best when it serves the artist," Gray said.

Michael Romanowski, the mastering engineer on "Immersive," nodded in agreement, adding: "Go humans! We're humans and we make music for humans."

Veteran guitarist Nuno Bettencourt shared this year's Best Rock Performance Grammy win with singer Yungblud, bassist Frank Bello and keyboardist Adam Wakeman. Like audio engineer Romanowski, Bettencourt stressed the importance of humans in making music.

"With all the AI coming in, everybody's worried. Don't be," he said. "This is the biggest opportunity for rockers and rock 'n' roll, and anybody in any genre, to (stress) that real music, real songs, have a bit of danger in them. There's blood on the page, real stories that touch you. If you put yourself on the page, AI ain't touching that; nobody's reproducing that.

"Imperfection is where rock 'n' roll lives. Everybody's cleaning up the imperfections (with AI) … Anybody can do it in a studio; we all know that. But if you can do it on a stage, AI ain't messing with you there. That's when you separate (AI from) the real musicians, the real artists."

Remy Le Boeuf is this year's best instrumental composition Grammy-winner. He emphasized that because he focuses on "creating music in a real space," AI "doesn't apply to what I do so much. And as a composer, I write everything on piano and sax."

'A real threat'

Eight-time Grammy-victor Jon Batiste notched his latest win this year for "Big Money," which earned top honors in the best Americana album category. By coincidence, the songs on "Big Money" are inspired by Batiste's growing concerns about capitalism and the diminishing value placed on spirituality, individuality and human interaction at a time when AI is becoming increasingly prevalent.

"I'm not someone who's against necessarily where technology can go, but it's never going to be Jon Batiste. Sorry," he said.

"This album, 'Big Money,' is about the world today, about the environment, about big tech in a time where there is a real threat to artists in a room creating together. I'm excited about technology, but I don't think AI can sound like a human. It's not something that's possible.

"It can sound like a simulation of Jon Batiste, but it won't be Jon Batiste. And that's exciting for artists who make music in a way that utilizes the superpowers and traditions and lineages that have been left by our ancestors for hundreds of years. That's not something an algorithm or a large language model can facilitate because it has nuances that are occurring in a split second with people in the room that are deciding things based on the environment, based on what they brought into the day, based on the combination of their personal lineages coming together to create one moment that can never be repeated again, and then responding to the audience.

"Everything we do comes from people who gave up their time, their energy, their sacrifice to create this beautiful art. It's really something that takes so much of your soul to be a vessel for that flow to come through and just be in the song."

Being in the songs that he writes has been Jack Tempchin's driving inspiration since he devoted himself to music 60 years ago. While he welcomes Suno as a tool that can set his lyrics to music in the near blink of an eye, he is acutely aware of the pitfalls of technology.

How aware?

In February, Tempchin used Suno to set to music the lyrics for his somberly worded new song, "AI Heals The World." It can be heard, like his two new Suno albums, on his website: jacktempchin.com.

The song begins: "When the AI takes my job / Will I be homeless on the street? / I got kids to feed / How can I buy them something to eat?"

HOME&GARDEN

DESIGN RECIPES

ON TREND

By CATHY HOBBS
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Recent furniture markets and designer showcases are revealing a new trend, the use of bright, vibrant, bold color as well as interesting shapes, some a nod toward vintage.

From art deco to mid-century modern references to organic silhouettes and a renewed embrace of Southwestern color palettes, today's trends celebrate warmth, coziness and a deviation from the minimalism and overly neutral color palettes that have dominated in recent years.

Based on the current trends, here are some tips to kick-start your home décor.

1. Incorporate timeless furnishings. Mid-century modern and art deco influences are fashion forward and on trend.

2. Choose organic shaped furniture "statement" pieces such as coffee and side tables. Rigid and rectangular is out and soft and organic is in.

3. Embrace warm Southwestern color palettes. Deep oranges, rusts and cranberry tones add richness and warmth, particularly when layered with neutral backdrops.

4. Use oversized artwork as a focal point. Large-scale pieces especially those in warm soothing, desert-inspired hues can anchor a room and create a sense of coziness.

5. Treat bold artwork as architecture for the wall. Strong compositions and saturated colors are now viewed as bold and creative.

6. Introduce color through textiles such as colorful toss pillows and throws.

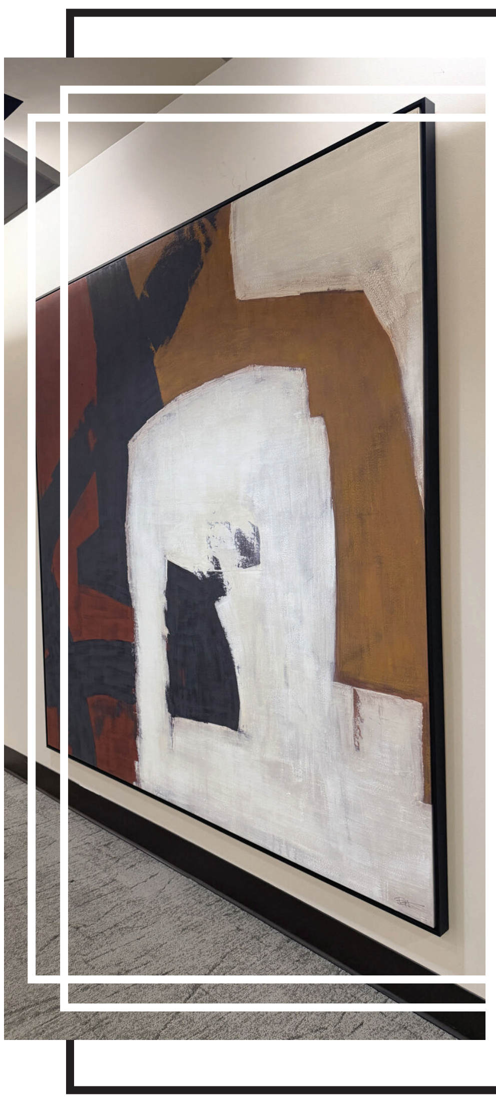
7. Balance vibrant accents with organic materials such as wood and stone.

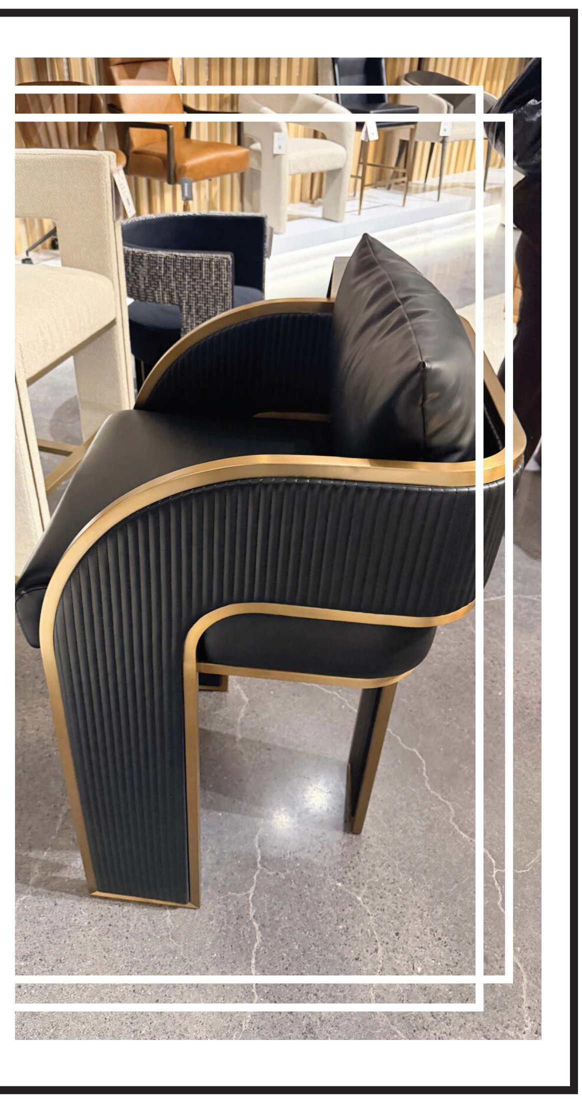
8. Infuse textured accessories and accents such as pottery and earthenware.

9. Mix styles and materials. These days, a room with a singular focus is often considered bland and boring.

10. Prioritize statement pieces over clutter. Look to use a "statement" piece as a springboard to your design or color story.

Cathy Hobbs is the owner of Cathy Hobbs Design Recipes, a home staging company based in New York City (www.cathyhobbs.com). She is also the owner of Highland Passive House, a Home Staging + Design Center based in New York's Hudson Valley (www.highlandpassivehouse.com). Cathy's practical, how-to design advice can also be found in her book, "Home Design Recipes."





TOP LEFT: Coffee tables in organic shapes. **TOP RIGHT:** Warm southwestern accents in deep orange and cranberry. **RIGHT:** Oversized artwork featuring southwestern colors. **FAR RIGHT:** An art deco inspired bar stool.

Handout photos / TNS

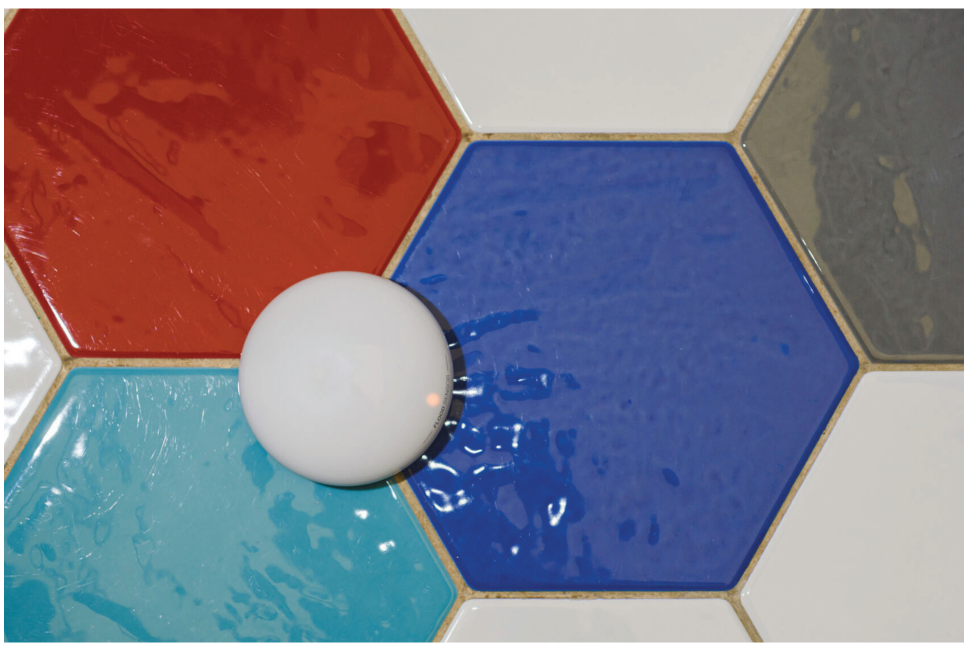
Can sustainable home design and tech lower my home costs?

Angie Hicks
Ask Angi

Sustainable home upgrades aren't just about helping the environment anymore – they're about controlling your monthly expenses. According to Angi's 2025 State of Home Spending Report, homeowners are increasingly prioritizing projects that reduce operating costs rather than purely cosmetic renovations. As utility prices and maintenance expenses rise, many homeowners are realizing the most valuable upgrade isn't what you see – it's what you stop paying for.

One of the biggest shifts we're seeing is homeowners starting with efficiency before aesthetics. Before remodeling a kitchen or bathroom, homeowners are sealing air leaks, improving insulation and servicing HVAC systems. Homeowners should think of their house as a system: When heating and cooling escape through gaps, you're essentially paying to heat or cool the outdoors. A professional energy audit can identify problem areas, and even simple fixes like weatherstripping, attic insulation or duct sealing can quickly lower energy bills.

Technology is also making sustainable living easier and more accessible. Smart thermostats, leak detectors and automated irrigation systems allow homeowners to control energy and water use in real time. A smart thermostat adjusts temperatures when you're away, while a water sensor can alert you to a leak before it becomes a costly repair. These smaller upgrades are often the best place to start because they require little disruption to the home and can pay for themselves quickly in avoided repairs and lower utility costs.



Dreamstime / TNS

Installing a leak detector near plumbing fixtures is a simple upgrade that can prevent significant repair costs.

Water efficiency is another area where homeowners can see immediate benefits. Many homeowners don't realize water damage is one of the most common and expensive home repairs. As a solution, install leak-detection devices near water heaters and washing machines and under sinks, and upgrade to low-flow showerheads and toilets. Outdoors, smart irrigation controllers prevent overwatering and help avoid foundation and landscaping issues, especially during changing seasonal weather patterns.

Material choices matter, too. Instead of selecting finishes based only on appearance, homeowners are choosing durable materials that last longer and require less maintenance. Fiber-cement siding, composite decking, and long-life roofing materials may cost more upfront, but they reduce repair frequency and replacement costs over time. Sustainable design often means fewer projects later – and fewer surprise expenses.

The good news is you don't need solar panels or a major renovation to make a home more sustainable. My key advice is to start small: Install LED lighting, service your HVAC system annually, add insulation, and consider one smart home device that monitors energy or water. Sustainable homes aren't necessarily high-tech or futuristic – they're simply homes designed to prevent waste, avoid damage, and make homeownership more predictable and affordable.

Tweet your home care questions with #AskingAngi and we'll try to answer them in a future column.

Photos by Bill Barrow / AP

Passengers board the Amtrak Crescent headed towards New York on March 26 in Atlanta.

Midnight train from Georgia

A view of America from the tracks as airports struggle in the shutdown

By BILL BARROW
Associated Press

There's something melodic about watching the sun rise over a rural stillness broken only by the rhythms of steel wheels on tracks. Or so we tell ourselves.

In this case, being aboard a train at all owed more to politics than poetry.

Congress and Donald Trump were mired in their latest budget stalemate, one rooted in the Republican president's immigration crackdown and the tactics of federal forces he has sent to U.S. cities. But this impasse has upended a foundational constant of American life today: easy air travel.

In Atlanta, my hometown airport, cheerfully marketed as the world's busiest, had descended into organized chaos. Unpaid federal employees called out from work, leaving a diminished security staff to screen travelers frustrated by hourslong waits in line. I wanted to get to Washington for the NCAA basketball tournament. So I eliminated the risk of a missed flight and booked the train overnight and into game day across a 650-mile route.

In this fraught moment in U.S. politics, I slowed down and thought about things we take for granted. Who ever ponders the conveniences of that 20th-century innovation, the airplane, that makes 21st-century hustle possible? We book and board. An unconscious, first-world flex of modernity. It's even rarer to grapple with the inconvenience.

My decision had taken me further back, to the 19th century and another defining innovation: the long-distance train.

A 14½-hour weekend train ride is time aplenty to appreciate how completely politics, economics, social strife and fights over identity and belonging have always affected the order of our lives, including how, when and where we move around in these United States. But Amtrak's Crescent also allowed me to see the expanse of our collective experience.

I traversed the urban, suburban and rural breadth of East Coast America. I learned how other travelers came aboard. And in that, I found the portrait of people, past and present, who refuse to be as paralyzed as some of their elected leaders.

This image made from video shows the Virginia countryside, as seen from an Amtrak train on March 27.

The Amtrak station in Danville, Va., is seen March 27.

Convenience on the railways

There is little glamour late night in a crowded Amtrak station. Children are up past bedtime and tended by frazzled parents. Older adults struggle with luggage and stairs.

Airports are not red-carpet affairs either, of course. But there is a certain cache to Delta's Atlanta-Washington flights. They typically take about two hours gate to gate. They often are slotted at a midpoint gate of the concourse nearest the main terminal. That is almost certainly a nod to members of Congress who use it – but who have lost some airline perks during this extended partial shutdown.

In normal circumstances I can get from my front porch to Capitol Hill or downtown in as little as 4½ hours. Security lines these days could at least double my overall air travel time.

The train is still longer, and time is money, we are taught. But certainty has value, too, even if it means at 11:29 p.m. departure. And at the Amtrak station, there were no standstill lines, no Transportation Security Administration agents, no ICE agents as stand-ins.

Passengers who arrived mere minutes before departure made it on board and found seats quickly – assigned in boarding order, not predetermined zones that yield jammed aisles. There's no in-seat service or satellite TV. But even coach seats, the lowest Amtrak tier, are as spacious as airline first-class – and there is Wi-Fi, so it's not the 19th century or even 20th century after all.

On board, I heard one crew member joke, "I'm no TSA agent."

The pathways of history

As a boy in rural Alabama, I counted train cars and wondered where they were headed. I've since read diary entries and letters from my grandmother and her sisters recounting World War II-era weekend trips to Atlanta.

The South's largest city has a historical hook, too. Originally named "Terminus," Atlanta developed in the antebellum era as a critical intersection of north-south and east-west rail routes. That is what drew Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman for one of the Civil War's seminal campaigns that helped defeat the Confederacy.

A century after the Civil War, Delta chose Atlanta for its headquarters rather than Birmingham, Alabama, which was the larger city as of the 1960 census. The company's decision was tied up in tax breaks for the airline, named for its crop duster origins in the Mississippi Delta region. According to some interpretations, Delta's decision was made easier because of the more overt racism of Alabama's and Birmingham's leaders as they defended Jim Crow – a code that, among other acts, allowed states to segregate the passenger trains that predated Amtrak.

On this night, I heard many languages and accents, notable given the role that immigrant labor played in building the U.S. rail system and especially striking now with immigration – legal and illegal – at the forefront in Washington, my destination. I saw faces that reflected U.S. pluralism, a different mix from what my grandmother and aunts would have seen a lifetime ago.

The array of voices celebrated the freedom and ease of rail travel. So did Agatha Grimes and her friends after they boarded in Greensboro, North Carolina, as part of a long weekend trip to celebrate her 62nd birthday.

"I got stuck in the Atlanta airport last week," Grimes said, as her group laughed together in the dining car. "It's just nuts."

Beretta Nunnally, a self-described "train veteran" who organized their trip, said, "There's no worry about parking. No checking bags. You come to the station, you get where you going, and you come home."

An era for planes, trains and automobiles

Still, that is not as easy in the United States as it once was.

Just as politics, economics and subsidies helped grow U.S. railroads, those factors diminished the network as auto manufacturers, oil companies, roadbuilders and, finally, airline manufacturers and airlines commanded favor from politicians and attention from consumers.

Riding hours across rural areas, I noticed the junkyards where kudzu and chain-link fencing framed rows of rusted automobiles. I saw the farmland and equipment that helps feed cities and the rest of the nation. I awoke to see the night lights of office towers in Charlotte, North Carolina, and its NFL stadium. I saw vibrant county seats – and I thought of countless other towns like them that are not thriving as they sit disconnected from passenger rail and far from the Eisenhower-era interstate system that we crossed multiple times on our way.

In each setting, voters – conservatives, liberals, the extremes and betweens – have chosen their representatives, senators and a president who now set the nation's course.

When I arrived in Washington, I paused to enjoy Union Station's grand hall and its Beaux Arts appeal, and I lamented how much splendor has been lost because so many striking U.S. terminals have been razed. I stepped outside and looked up at the Capitol dome.

While I had slept, the Senate managed a bipartisan deal to fund all of the Department of Homeland Security except immigration enforcement. As I continued northward, House Republican leaders rejected it. The stalemate continued.

I was a weary traveler but renewed citizen. I had a game to get to. And the train rolled on.